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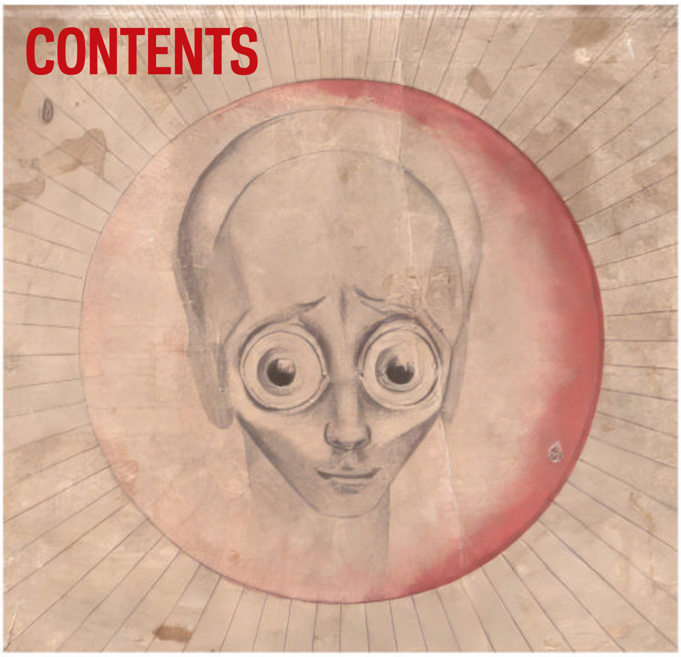

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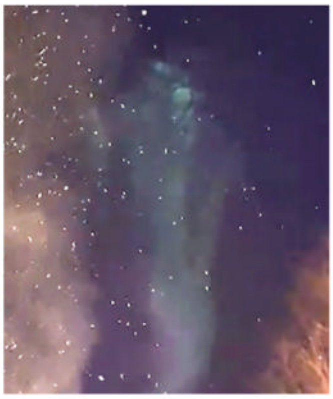

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ForteanTimes
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ForteanTimes

EDITOR
DAVID SUTTON
drsutton@forteantimes.com

FOUNDING EDITORS
BOB RICKARD (ft-bobrickard@mail.com)
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

NEWS EDITOR
IAN SIMMONS (simmons@forteantimes.com)

ART DIRECTOR
ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteantimes.com)

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR
DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteantimes.com)

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
ABIGAIL MASON

RESIDENT CARTOONIST
HUNT EMERSON

PRODUCTION MANAGER
LEE BOYMAN (lee.boyman@metropolis.co.uk)

ADVERTISING
JAMES KELLOCK (james.kellock@metropolis.co.uk)

FT ON THE INTERNET

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Managing Director
David Saunders TEL: +44 (0) 208 752 8195
david.saunders@metropolis.co.uk

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DOCTOR ZHIVAGOAT

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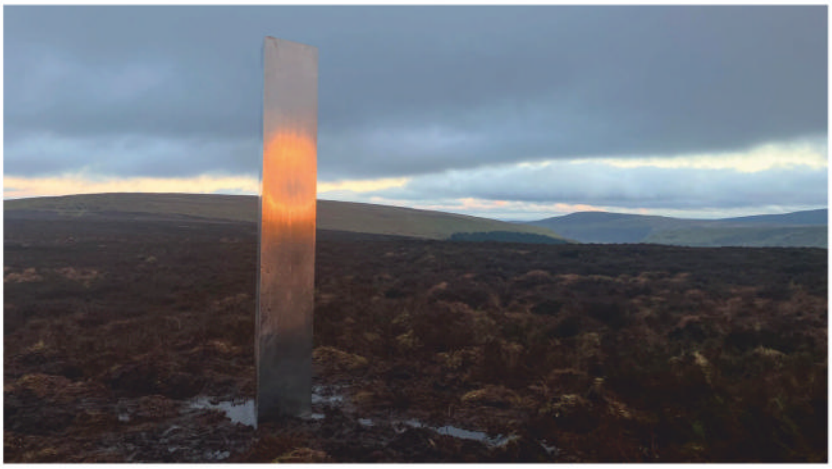
EDITORIAL

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



JANE TUDGAY AND ROB VERMEIRE

SCIENCE AND SNAKE OIL

While perhaps not as determinedly – some might say wilfully – sceptical of mainstream science (and most other modes of human enquiry) as was Charles Fort, FT readers would probably err on the side of caution when confronted with supposedly definitive scientific answers to complex problems: the mantra of "Follow The Science" repeatedly trotted out during the Covid pandemic to justify a host of major public health interventions must have set a few fortean eyes rolling (see Ian J Kidd's reevaluation of Fort's *New Lands* on pp.48-49 for some relevant discussion). Still, while one might charitably put such attempts to justify policy made on the hoof with an appeal to an outmoded idea of a definitive scientific 'truth' down to the genuine difficulties of addressing a novel public health crisis, there's no doubt that 'The Science' has sometimes been mobilised in the service of particular ideologies other than that of supposedly scientific objectivity. In this issue SD Tucker – whose 'Strange Statesmen' column has lifted the lid on many political peculiarities – brings us three linked extracts from his new book on totalitarian abuses of science, drawing on prime examples from the Communist Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and, bringing us up to date, Putin's Russia. And then,of course, there's good old-fashioned snake oil and brazen quackery, as embodied by this month's cover star, Dr John R Brinkley, the Texas 'goat gland' guru who promised to cure 'men's problem's' by transplanting goat testicles into his human patients. But Brinkley's successful career was characterised by mixing such dubious 'science' with political campaigning and a savvy grasp of modern media: it's a combination that should still ring alarm bells.

MONOLITH SEEKERS

We were pleased to see the return of the mystery monolith – a staple of weird news in 2020 – and would like to thank intrepid FT pals Jane Tudgay and Rob Vermeire for making the arduous (and extremely muddy – we've seen the pictures) trek up Hay Bluff to find and photograph the Kubrickian obelisk that appeared there in March. More on p.6.

ERRATA

440:7: Rob Gandy, an enthusiastic visitor to numberless public houses and, perhaps surprisingly, eagle-eyed spotter of errors, pointed out a mistake that was for him closer to home than most: "In the Strange Days item 'Fiery Coincidence' it states that The Crooked House pub is 'in Walsall, West Midlands'. As I drank many times in The Crooked House, and it is where we held my mum's wake, I have to tell you that it is/was at the opposite end of the Black Country, just outside Himley, and about 12 miles from Walsall. It was a great and unique pub – you felt drunk when you walked in, without having had a pint, it was so disorienting; and I always rolled the marble up the wall for charity: it was an optical illusion."

Meanwhile, the saga of the famously wonky inn – burned down last year in a suspected arson attack – continues, with the building's subsequent demolition by its owner being declared illegal and South Staffordshire District Council issuing an enforcement notice stating that the Crooked House must be "built back to what it was prior to the fire". (*Guardian, 27 Feb 2024*). The site's owners have appealed the notice, but with a 35,000-strong Facebook support group and the Mayor of the West Midlands behind the rebuilding effort, we sincerely hope that Rob will one day get to enjoy another pint in the Crooked House.

ForteanTimes PRESENTS

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Plus, our resident UFO experts Jenny Randles and Nigel Watson provide updates and analysis to help readers put famous cases into context and separate ufological fact from fiction.

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

ZIMBABWE GOBLINS

One family's life has been turned upside-down by a malign poltergeist... or is it a goblin?

A family from Magwegwe North in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, has been under relentless assault from an energetic poltergeist since last November. The family, who have understandably preferred to remain anonymous, have three children aged 13, 12 and eight, and blame the attacks on "goblins".

Describing their experience, an adult family member said: "It started last November. One morning, our children woke up with their heads shaved. We thought it was a one-time thing." However, this turned out to be just the beginning of a prolonged ordeal. "The next day, our youngest child woke up in the middle of the night, screaming. He had been stabbed in the leg with a knife! He also woke up with his head shaved again." (It seems the shaving was partial.) "We were all terrified and completely clueless about what was happening," the family spokesperson explained. This onslaught continued to escalate: "Doors and windows would come open inexplicably, our children's clothes, especially their uniforms, would be torn, and they could no longer attend school." The 13-year-old says that she is too scared to go to school for fear of being stripped naked. "Whenever I get ready, I find my uniform torn or missing. It's become impossible for me to attend classes because all my uniforms are damaged, and I have nothing to wear. We sometimes get slapped or hit by stones that seem to appear out of nowhere, making our lives a living nightmare," she said.

LEFT: Clothes and belongings scattered by the polt. **FACING PAGE**: Images of suposed goblins from previous Zimbabwean news reports

> *"These unseen forces have one goal: to kill the children"*

The family have also experienced sounds of someone cooking in the kitchen when there was no one there, food vanishing from the fridge and pots from the kitchen, and lights flickering on and off in the house. They attempted to combat the poltergeist through spiritual means, but with little success. "We sought help from different prophets and churches, but the situation only worsened after each attempt." Indeed, after one such intervention, things became even worse. "We hired a spiritual healer for a cleansing ceremony. The following day, the house mysteriously burned down, but only the bedrooms were affected. Everything in the kitchen and dining room was untouched." To protect their children, the family sent them to stay with their maternal grandmother in South Africa, but the phenomenon followed them, and they reported that the children were beaten by something invisible at this new location, and, in addition, food was tampered with, windows were broken, clothes were scattered around, and money mysteriously vanished from the house. It is unclear whether the phenomenon still manifested at their home in Zimbabwe while the children were away.

As sending the children to their grandmother had not helped, the family brought them home again. "We tried to protect the children by making them sleep at a neighbour's house, but the disturbances followed them there too. Last night the neighbour's room was trashed again, and they were soaked with water. We are at a loss." The neighbour, Ruramai Dliwayo, described the experience, and believes the polt has murderous intent. "The children were sleeping in my living room when a teapot and cups from the display cabinet were mysteriously moved and used to hit the children throughout the night," she explained. "My grandchild, who was sleeping nearby, ran away in fear and slept inside the wardrobe. I am convinced these unseen forces have one goal: to kill the children. I fear they may die while under my care."

A team from the local *B-Metro* news website visiting the family saw a brick from the house shatter a window in front of them. The children's other grandmother, Mayinesi Chongwe, who lives locally and clearly is not concerned about anonymity, complained that the poltergeist attacks had resulted in her being shunned as a witch by the local community. Visibly upset, Chongwe said: "At 80 years old, I've never practised witchcraft or used any charms. I'm a Christian. Some neighbours accuse me of witchcraft, believing I'm behind these misfortunes." She added: "This makes getting help difficult. When a fire broke out, neighbours watched instead of helping." Nothing the family has tried has succeeded in getting the polt to relent. "The children are suffering the most, and there is no peace in our lives. Everyone is afraid of us, and we don't know where to turn. We are pleading for any help we can get," said the family spokesperson.

There is a wider context for these events in Zimbabwe, which has been experiencing something of a goblin flap centred around schools and children in recent years. Children have allegedly died from goblin assaults; in September 2022, in Cowdray Park, Bulawayo, six-year-old Emmanuel Mahole was playing in their yard with his younger sister and friend while his mother prepared supper in the kitchen when, she said, "I just heard my boy screaming, saying he was being attacked with a brick. When I bolted out of the kitchen to check on what was

PRINCESSES OF WAILS
The plight of female royals in the classics
PAGE 11

STRANGE CONTINENT
Ghost ships and other European oddities
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CHARIOTS OF THE GODS
The spiritual side of UFO encounters
PAGE 28

happening, I found him crying pointing to the sky saying: 'There is the boy who is hitting me with a brick'." She and a neighbour looked where Emmanuel was pointing, she claims, but they could see nothing, although the boy reportedly kept on ducking as if he was avoiding an invisible creature attacking him. He then cried out that it was choking him and started frothing at the mouth. He collapsed with breathing difficulties and could not be revived by paramedics. A local mother, Happy Maseko, said, "This is a scary incident, and we are now living in fear because the invisible creature which attacked the boy might also attack our children," while Thabani Sibanda, 46, said the incident reminded locals of a goblin named Maqobola that once wreaked havoc, raining stones on residents' houses and destroying window panes.

Shortly after, children at Kumalo Primary School in Bulawayo were allegedly "attacked by goblins", with pupils claiming they were being slapped by an invisible hand, had been shouted at by an unseen being in the toilet, and had seen a strange snake. After this, the affected pupils complained of throbbing headaches, while some were also allegedly hallucinating. A year later, goblins were claimed to be behind what appears to be a social panic at the Magama Mission Primary School in Tsholotsho District, Matabeleland, the province around Bulawayo. Here, it is claimed, attacks by invisible entities left about a dozen children between five and 15 unable to walk. "There are about 12 children who are affected by this condition and what happens is that when it starts, the children convulse as if they are being choked by unknown creatures. This makes them feel weak and unable to walk," said Ntulani village head Vincent Hadebe. Local hospitals had been unable to treat the victims, he added, while traditional healers had also failed to stem the attacks, although they claimed to have "fished" out strange creatures that included snakes, monitor lizards, human waste, a baboon and three monkeys from homesteads in the area. "The children are scared of going to school and some of our intelligent children failed to write their end of term examinations due to this problem," said Hadebe.

Teachers do not seem immune to the goblins either. As far back as 2019, Fudu primary and secondary schools in Nkayi, Matabeleland North Province, were closed for several weeks after goblins allegedly caused the female teachers to wake up wearing the male teachers' trousers. "I have not seen anything like that! It's strange. Just imagine about six of us strangely woke up wearing trousers of our male colleagues," said one of the affected teachers. The male teachers, too, experienced problems, falling into trances and having visions of shoes belonging to a deceased colleague. "Witch-hunters conducted cleansing, but they failed to get rid of the beings which they claimed are goblins," said local resident Robert Moyo. Later, in nearby Hojeni, Vinika Ncube, Councillor for the area, said: "We had a problem at Hojeni Primary School, as teachers were complaining of being sexually harassed during the night by invisible things." These were believed to be goblins that locals had summoned to help them make money. "Some of the things wanted food from teachers while others abused them sexually," said village head Anderson Matikiti Sibanda, while Ncube explained, "We have seen snakes and other objects which you cannot believe exist. The people who owned these things have confessed without duress that it is their things, and we hope once the whole village is cleansed, we will have peace." This was also allegedly a problem at Makumbi Primary School in Plumtree, where "sexually insatiable" goblins were claimed to be leaving female teachers with scratches on their thighs and around their sexual organs, and to be stealing their underwear, causing them to flee and disrupt the school's operation. Just prior to the poltergeist outbreak, all this led the *B-metro* editor to publish a crusading comment piece saying "It is important that such problems, which are real and not imagined, are resolved to the satisfaction of all. It would appear some strange spiritual forces are slowly taking over many schools in the rural areas, where many villagers believe the beings are owned by some in their community for purposes of wealth accumulation, among other reasons." He went on to conclude that "there is no doubt that there are problems at some schools, and burying our heads in the sand will not be a solution." *bmetro.co.ze, 17 Oct 2019, 7 Apr, 12 May, 29 Sept, 1 Nov 2022, 28 Sept 2023; bulawayo24.com, 2 Mar 2024.* For previous goblin trouble in Zimbabwe, see **FT334:8, 357:20-21, 397:9.**

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S SHED EXPLODES

Croydon Advertiser, 26 Jan 2024.

Plymouth man denies attack with seagull

BBC News, 6 Jan 2020.

THE WORLD IS ABOUT TO GET AN INCREDIBLE VIEW OF URANUS

iflscience.com, 7 Nov 2023.

NASA discovers gas emanating from Uranus

neatorama.com, 29 Mar 2021.

URANUS HAS SUFFERED A POUNDING SO HARD IT GOT TILTED

physics-astronomy.com, 15 May 2023.

Volunteers polish giant's erection by hand

Metro, 29 Aug 2019.

SIDELINES

TELEPORTING TOMATO

Astronaut Frank Rubio was baffled when one of the tomatoes he had grown on the International Space Station vanished. "I was pretty confident that I Velcroed it where I was supposed to Velcro it. And then I came back, and it was gone," he said. Fellow astronauts accused Rubio of eating it, but after 20 hours of searching, he gave up, saying, "Hopefully somebody will find it someday, a little shrivelled thing." Eight months later, it mysteriously turned up again, although NASA has not said where. "We can exonerate him. We found the tomato," said Rubio's fellow astronaut Jasmin Moghbeli. *theguardian.com, 9 Dec 2023.*

OOP SHARK?

Residents of Fortrose, near Inverness in Scotland, were startled to receive a Google alert warning them to beware of a great white shark in the area and asking them to comb local beaches for a tracking tag the fish had shed. Fortunately, it only took a few minutes for a correction to be issued, withdrawing the alert, which had been intended for a town of the same name in New Zealand, on the other side of the world. *D.Star, 8 Dec 2023.*

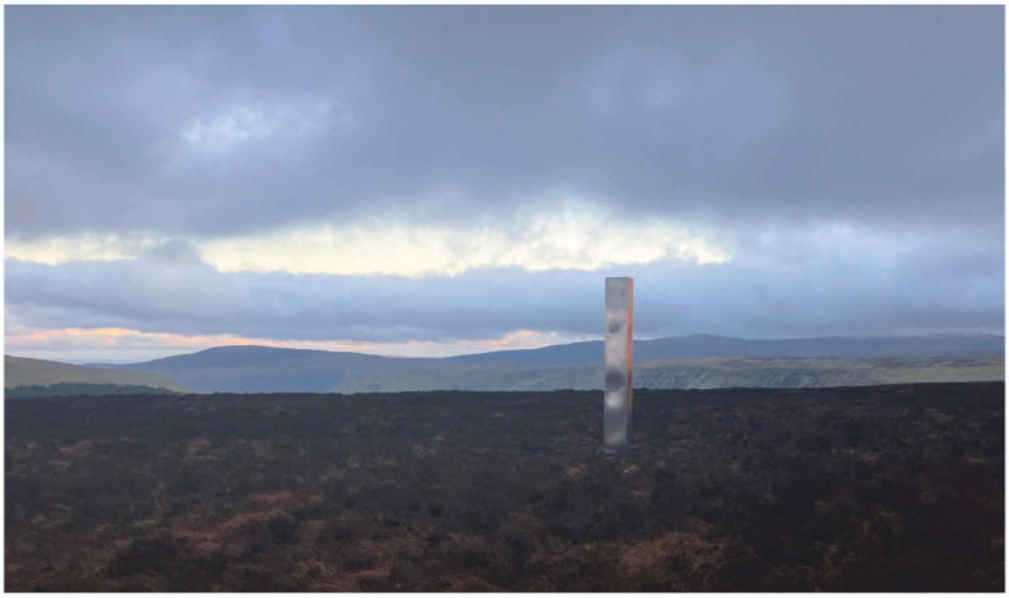
DOG TYRED

For months, residents of the southern Italian village of Vastogirardi suspected they were the victims of a vicious vendetta after repeatedly finding the tyres of their cars slashed. Police had no luck finding the culprit, despite mounting plain clothes patrols, so set up surveillance cameras. These finally nailed the vandal, who turned out to be a dog named Billy, who was filmed biting the tyres of several cars. It is believed that he was suffering from severe gum disease and was chewing tyres to relieve the pain. Police are now holding his owner liable for for the damage. *theguardian.com, 4 Dec 2023.*

MARTIN ROSS

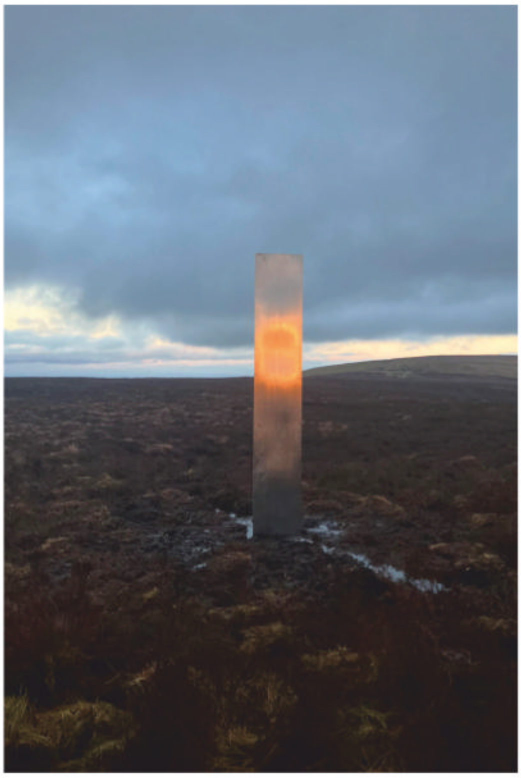
MONOLITHOMANIA!

Mysterious monoliths and obelisks are all the rage in Wales



PHOTOS: JANE TUDGAY & ROB VERMEIRE

ABOVE & BELOW: Intrepid FT pals Jane Tudgay and Rob Vermeire trekked to the remote location on top of Hay Bluff, near Hay on Wye, to find and photograph the mysterious monolith – just in time to catch it reflecting the rays of the setting Sun.



Following the mysterious appearance of a 10ft (3m) tall shining steel obelisk in a remote location in a Utah canyon in 2020, found by ranchers carrying out an aerial count of the region's bighorn sheep, the world seemed briefly seized by monolithomania. First another appeared in California, and then others started turning up internationally, in Romania, Ukraine and the UK (**FT401:4+14, 402:24, 406:26**). This sparked fevered speculation about their potential alien origin, inspired by memories of the black alien structures in the Stanley Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. One, on Glastonbury Tor, had "not Banksy" etched on it, giving a nod to another equally mysterious artist. Others in the UK popped up on Dartmoor, in the centre of the Merry Maidens stone circle in Cornwall and on the beach in Compton Bay on the Isle of Wight. They usually vanished as abruptly as they had appeared a few days after being found, having created a media stir.

Then, just as they were starting to be thought of as a 21st century equivalent of crop circles, they stopped. A New Mexico-based artist group known as The Most Famous Artist eventually owned up to creating and placing the US monoliths. The one that appeared in Turkey turned out to be the work of the government to promote a space launch announcement, and designer Tom Dunford took credit for the Isle of Wight structure. The origin of the rest, though, remains shrouded in mystery.

Now, it seems they have returned, with a new, three-sided, Toblerone-shaped structure made of shining steel showing up on Hay Bluff near Hay on Wye in Powys, Wales. It was first

> *"When I first saw it, I was a bit taken aback as it looked like a UFO"*

COUYRTESY SAMANA / BANDCAMP

ABOVE: The new album by Welsh musical duo Samana – Rebecca Rose Harris and Franklin Mockett – features a strange obelisk on its cover; the special edition includes a map to the secret location where they have erected the mysterious structure.

spotted by local runner Richard Haynes, who said, "I thought it looked a bit bizarre and might be a scientific media research thing collecting rainwater, but then realised it was way too tall and strange for that." He added, "I went up to it and it was about 10-foot [3m] tall at least and triangular, definitely stainless steel," adding, "It was hollow, and I imagine pretty light. Light enough for two people to carry it up and plant it in the ground." As someone who runs the route frequently, Haynes said he had never seen the monolith before and that a friend who passed the spot two weeks before had said it definitely wasn't there then. "I did notice on Google that it's popped up fairly recently and from what I can gather it disappears after a couple of days," he said.

Craig Muir, a local builder, unexpectedly encountered the thing on the morning of 12 March and shot a video for TikTok. "When I first saw it, I was a bit taken aback as it looked like some sort of a UFO," he said. "It seemed like a very fine metallic [material]. The steel structure was almost 10 feet long and looked perfectly levelled and steady, despite the weather being windy." Muir was certain that the obelisk had been deliberately placed on the hillside. "It didn't seem like it was chucked in there, instead it has been accurately put in the ground," he said. "However, there were no obvious tracks around it, and one would think that there would be a lot of mess around it, but there wasn't." He speculated it might have been lowered from a helicopter. "It must be some sort of art installation… If you didn't know anything, to look at it, you could have easily thought it had been dropped off by a UFO or something."

Tom Dunford denies responsibility for the Hay monolith, but there is some suspicion locally that Muir, who is familiar with metal fabrication, might have made the thing himself. He rebuts this, saying, "I'm not claiming to have made it, I just happened to find it as I go up there every day, sometime twice, as a form of exercise and to walk the dogs. I think whoever did it was quite skilled. If I had to guess I would say it would cost between 100 and 200 quid as it's no more than one large sheet of steel." Muir adds: "I'd say it was like a surgical steel because obviously whoever's done it doesn't want it to rust." He says it cannot be aluminium because, "it had too much shine to it, it was very, very smooth, very shiny, very crisp edges." In a later video posted on social media Muir said people were asking him why he didn't touch the monolith. He then cheekily goes up and touches it, editing the video to make it seem as if he disappears on contact.

Interestingly, the monolith appeared at the same time as Welsh band Samana – Rebecca Rose Harris and Franklin Mockett – released their album *Ascension* in a deluxe edition that comes with a limited-edition map guiding listeners to a secret Welsh location where they have built the obelisk pictured on the album's cover. This, though, is a metre high, made of limestone and emblazoned with an ancient Sanskrit symbol, not three metres tall and made of stainless steel. The band claim to have transported and erected the monument themselves, saying: "It took one day and one night of battling with the elements to erect."

Explaining why they did this, Harris and Mockett say: "Beyond the ideas explored in the album musically, we wanted to create tangible dimensions in which to bridge the gap between music and fine art, in an attempt to create an all-encompassing world that creates an entirely idiosyncratic experience. The map is but a passage to this world." *walesonline.com, 11 Mar; telegraph.co.uk, boingboing.net, wjw.com, BBC News, 13 Mar; news.artnet.com 14 Mar 2024.*

SIDELINES

24 HOUR PASTY PEOPLE

Police in Bideford, Devon, were called to a branch of Greggs in the town after a fight broke out between a pensioner on a mobility scooter and another customer over the last pasty on the shelf. The angry scooter owner rammed the other customer with his vehicle, causing him to fall over a sign. Police confiscated the mobility scooter but provided no information on what happened to the pasty. Meanwhile, on the same day, in Cornwall, a woman named Charlotte proposed to her girlfriend Kirsty by giving her a giant Cornish pasty with "Marry Me" baked onto it. She accepted. *independent.co.uk, itv.com, 13 Dec 2023.*

TORNADO MIRACLE

When a tornado hit her mobile home, Sydney Moore, 22, managed to save her son, aged one, but not her four-month-old, who was in the next room, despite her boyfriend trying to grab him. "The roof came off first, the tip of the tornado came down and picked up the bassinet with my baby in it," Moore said. "He was the first thing to go up." However, after a frantic 10-minute search, the child, still in his cot, was found alive and unharmed in a nearby tree. "I was pretty sure he was dead, and we weren't going to find him. But he's here, and that's by the grace of God," said Moore. *wsmv.com, 12 Dec 2023.*

ROBBERS ROBBED

Police in Commerce City, Colorado, had a relatively easy job rounding up thieves who held up a cheque-cashing business. As they attempted to flee the scene of the crime, they found someone had stolen their getaway car, leaving them stranded in the street. *D.Mirror, 23 Dec 2023.*

INAUSPICIOUS START

Forty guests dancing at a lavish wedding in a 15th century Tuscan monastery received a massive shock when an almost perfectly circular hole opened in the dance floor and dropped them 13ft (4m) amid a torrent of plaster and rubble. Everyone survived, but newlyweds Paolo Mugnaini and Valeria Ybarra, both 26, ended up spending their wedding night in adjacent hospital beds being treated for their injuries. *mailonline, 22 Jan 2024.*

SIDELINES...

NEST EGG

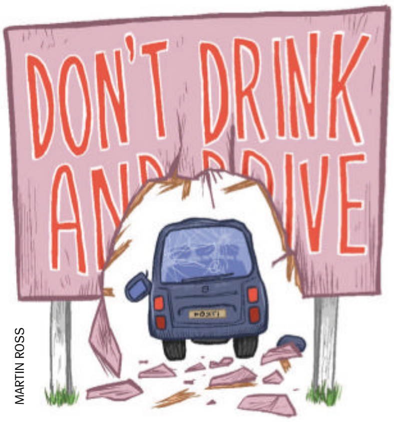
Jennifer Hall, from Texas, was surprised when a neighbour to whom she had given some eggs from her chickens told her they had found a penny inside one of them. "At first I thought it was a joke and I was laughing about it," said Hall, but her neighbour showed her the imprint of the penny on the membrane inside the egg, suggesting it must have formed round the coin. Chicken expert Jessamy Miller said that while "nature is always full of surprises, it's hard to visualise a way this could happen." However, *Backyard Poultry* magazine said, "You can have exceptionally weird things found in eggs." *au.news.yahoo.com, 15 Dec 2023.*

MYSTERY MAN

Medics at St Francis Medical Center in Lynwood, Los Angeles, were mystified by a patient they received on 17 December after he was taken ill in the street. Described as "an Asian man in his mid-50s or early 60s with black hair with sparse greys and dark brown eyes, 5ft 8in [1.7m] tall and weighing about 140lb [63.5kg]", he did not speak English and hospital staff were not able to work out what language he was speaking. The man was not carrying any ID and had not been able to provide his name or any useful information about himself. The hospital was appealing to the public in the hope that someone would recognise the man or his language. *yahoo.com/news, 29 Dec 2023.*

SMASHED

Police officers setting up a roadside display in Palm Springs, California, warning that they were targeting drunk drivers had an easy first arrest. Clarissa Hernandez ploughed into their large electronic display board in her Land Rover, having downed a pint of Tequila, and was immediately booked as she staggered from the wreckage. *D.Mirror, 6 Jan 2024.*

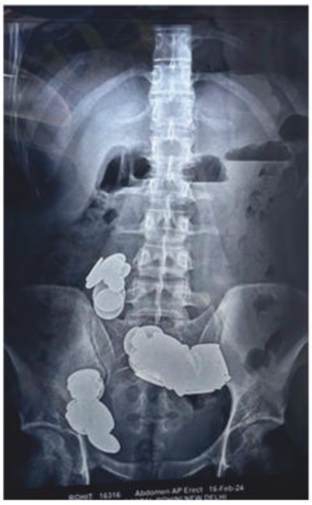


MARTIN ROSS

MEDICAL BAG

Twins from two wombs, the waters of youth and a metal-munching Indian weightlifter

KELSEY HATCHER / FACEBOOK



SIR GANGA RAM HOSPITAL

ABOVE LEFT: Kelsey Hatcher with her two twins from different wombs. **ABOVE RIGHT**: An X-ray shows the clumps of metal – coins and magnets – in an Indian man's intestine. **FACING PAGE**: Dr Joseph Dituri, ready for his 100 days underwater.

DOUBLE BARREL (AGAIN!)

Kelsey Hatcher, 32, of Birmingham, Alabama, gave birth to twins in December 2023, each of which had undergone gestation in separate wombs. Hatcher had known since she was a teenager that she had the rare condition uterus didelphys, giving her two separate uteruses. This is found in less than 0.3 per cent of women, and it is rare for someone to be simultaneously pregnant in both. Hatcher gave birth to her first child on 19 December, and the second on the 20th, so the twins, girls whom she has named Roxi and Rebel, have different birthdays as well as coming from separate wombs. The first was delivered vaginally, but the second by C-section. There are less than 20 cases of uterus didelphys twins on record (see **FT296:23** and **297:22** for some other cases), although in 2019 a woman in Bangladesh produced twins from one of her wombs a month after delivering a premature baby from the other, while in early 2023 Elle Ladowitz from Israel gave birth to a boy and a girl from separate wombs (**FT436:15**). *BBC News, 23 Dec 2023.*

MAGNETIC MUSCLES

An unnamed 26-year-old man was admitted to New Delhi's Sir Ganga Ram Hospital complaining of abdominal pain and vomiting that had gone on for more than 20 days. When he was X-rayed, he was found to have two large metallic clumps blocking his small intestine, with a further clump in his stomach. Surgeons operated immediately to remove the blockages, which were life-threatening, and found that the clumps were made up of 39 coins and 37 small magnets. In the small intestine, some of the magnets had locked together between the intestinal loops, causing holes to erode in the intestinal wall. The patient then spent seven days in hospital recovering. Questioned as to why he had swallowed the items, he explained that he was a weightlifter and believed they would give him a boost in zinc, which would help with his bodybuilding. While stomach acids will cause zinc to leach from things like coins, and the body will absorb it, the coins and magnets swallowed would have produced far more zinc than the body can handle. This causes zinc toxicity, which leads to stomach pains, diarrhoea and vomiting, and can potentially kill. *nypost.com, 28 Feb 2024.*

The metal clumps were made up of 39 coins and 37 small magnets

VACCINE ADDICT

Researchers from the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg have discovered a man from Magdeburg, Germany, who has had himself vaccinated against Covid 217 times. He had paid for the vaccines to be administered privately over a 29-month period and came to the attention of the university after a story about his vaccinations appeared in a local paper. "We contacted him and invited him to undergo various tests in Erlangen. He was very interested in doing so," said Dr Kilian Schober from the university's microbiology department. His team took blood and saliva samples and "We were able to use these samples to determine exactly how the immune system reacts to the vaccination," said Schober. He was concerned that hyper-stimulation of the immune system might have fatigued key cells, but the medics found no sign of this, and no sign that the man had ever contracted Covid. However, Schober warned that: "Importantly, we do not endorse hyper-vaccination as a strategy to enhance adaptive immunity," adding that “current research indicates that a three-dose vaccination, coupled with regular top-up vaccines for vulnerable groups, remains the favoured approach. There is no indication that more vaccines are required.” Alerted by the publicity, the public prosecutor of the city of Magdeburg opened a fraud investigation, but decided not to bring criminal charges. *BBC News, 5 Mar 2024.*

SMOKIN’ BONES

In Sierra Leone and other countries in West Africa, a new drug, kush, is reported to have surged through the community, resulting in the death of at least a dozen people a week and the hospitalisation of thousands more. This is sometimes through overdoses but also from head injuries and road accidents as the so-called “zombie drug” causes users to fall asleep while walking, to fall over, and to wander into moving traffic. Kush is a mixture of cannabis, fentanyl, tramadol and formaldehyde, and according to legend, ground-up human bones. Most of these components have a sedative and euphoric effect, although formaldehyde can cause hallucinations, and both the presence and the effect of the human bones, allegedly sourced from grave robbers, is disputed. It has been suggested the bones have a high sulphur content, which is supposed to contribute to the drug’s effect, or that if the bones come from a dead kush user, they boost the content of the rest of the substances. However, neither seem likely; bones do not contain significant amounts of sulphur, and when burned produce highly toxic sulphur dioxide, not a psychoactive substance, while drug residues do not accumulate in bones to any significant extent. Elsewhere in Africa, similar “polydrugs” are popular; in South Africa it is whoonga, also known as nyaope, a mixture of tobacco, cannabis, heroin and antiretroviral drugs used to treat Aids, some of which are hallucinogenic, and ‘white pipe’, a mixture of methaqualone (Mandrax), cannabis and tobacco. *sciencealert.com, 16 Jan 2024.*

HOARSE LEECH

A 53-year-old Vietnamese man believed his hoarse voice was the result of nothing more than a mild cold until he started to spit blood. Peering down his throat using a mirror, the man could only see a brown mass in his upper throat. Panicked, he went to the National Hospital of Endocrinology in Hanoi where doctors investigated using an endoscope. They discovered that the brown mass was, in fact, a 6cm (2.4in) leech locked onto his throat below the glottis, just above the entrance to his trachea. In trying to establish how the creature had ended up in the patient’s throat, medics found that he had injured his hand on a mouse trap about a month before and, as a follower of traditional Shennong herbal medicine, he had picked medicinal plants with which to treat his injury, and then chewed them into a paste that he applied to his wound. The wound healed without any trouble, but medics believe that because he did not wash the leaves, he had also managed to swallow a tiny leech that attached itself to his throat and rapidly grew by constantly feeding on his blood. *odditycentral.com, 8 Mar 2024.*

LAGOON OF YOUTH

After spending 100 days underwater in a pressurised 9m (30ft) square room 9m (30ft) down in a Florida lagoon, biomedical researcher Dr Joseph Dituri claims that he was “de-aged” by the experience. He says that blood tests showed that the levels of every inflammatory marker in his body had been halved by the experience and that his telomeres – structures on the end of chromosomes that normally erode through life – had got longer. “I’m 56 now. My extrinsic [biological] age was 44. When I got out of the water, my extrinsic age was 34, so, my telomeres lengthened. I actually got younger when I was under the water.” He also reported that he had shrunk in height by half an inch, reached 60-66 per cent rapid-eye movement sleep in comparison to 40 per cent before, and had his cholesterol drop by 72 points. Since he emerged from the chamber, Dituri says the length of his telomeres had fallen again, but they are still longer than when he went in. Dituri’s pod provided a hyperbaric environment, which involves living in an oxygen-saturated atmosphere at high pressure, something that is claimed to stimulate the growth of new blood vessels. During his underwater stint, Dituri was monitored by medical, psychological, and psychosocial experts and he believes it has implications far beyond extending life. “It’s an isolating confined extreme environment. And as humans, we really need to figure out how we’re going to be living in that (environment) if we’re going to expand our planet, if we’re going to go interplanetary, if we’re going to find all the cures that we need to find,” he said. *unilad.com, 13 Mar 2024.*

COURTESY DR JOSEPH DITURI

SIDELINES…

PHEW!

Seeking a better view of a jade ring worth one million yuan (£110,000) that a jeweller had brought to his home in Guangdong, China, the potential buyer took it to the window of his 9th floor flat to see it in natural light. However, as he held it up, it slipped through his fingers and splashed into a drainage ditch below. Distraught, the man hired a salvage team, each paid 500 yuan (£55) a day, to find it. The search took 72 hours and attracted hundreds of onlookers, but the ring was retrieved, and the owner set off fireworks to celebrate. *scmp.com, 22 Jan 2024*

THE ONE TRUE FAITH

On Reddit, a woman in the US reported that a year after she moved into a new house, workmen installing cables in the crawlspace discovered a DIY shrine to actor Nicholas Cage hidden under her home. There were 12 photos of Cage hanging from the ceiling, a kneeling rug, candles, a goblet, and a box full of items from his films. A friend of the householder commented: “It must have been a set up by the previous owner. I only know that she was a middle-aged lady, not sure if she has kids.” *mirror.co.uk, 23 Jan 2023.*

SALAD SIEGE

Incensed that their chicken kebab had arrived late, cold and missing its side salad, Paul Burton, 46, and Nathan Turner, 38, took the delivery driver hostage. They then used Facebook Live to broadcast their actions saying, “I’d like to report a crime: they stole my salad, and they stole the heat off my takeaway,” while brandishing a replica AK47 air rifle at the driver. This swiftly attracted police attention and firearms officers laid siege to the flat in Bedford and were fired on by Burton. After a 14-hour stand-off, the men eventually surrendered, later receiving significant prison sentences for their actions. *D.Mirror, 2 Dec 2023.*

NEAR MISS

An unnamed 57-year-old Wisconsin woman got a shock when she took a loaded gun into an MRI scan, even after having been warned to remove anything metal. The scanner’s powerful magnetic field pulled the trigger and shot her in the right buttock. She had a lucky escape; in other similar cases such behaviour has proved fatal. *D.Mail, 9 Dec 2023.*

SIDELINES...

WAKEY, WAKEY!

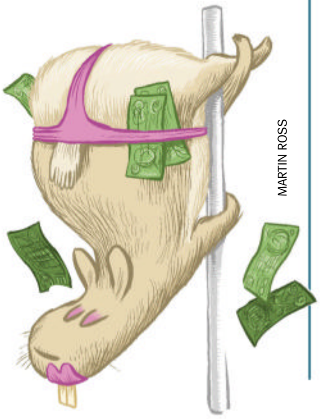
A reading group in Venice, California, has finally completed their read-through of James Joyce's notoriously challenging book *Finnegan's Wake,* 28 years, and 336 monthly sessions, after they began. Gerry Fialka, an experimental film maker, started the group in 1995 and they finished the book last October. They are now beginning again from the start; "It's like a Moebius strip; it's like a snake eating its tail," said Fialka. "All times are happening now." *NY Times Int Edition, 12 Dec 2023.*

CLEVER KITTY

While taking a break outside the annual Association of Dogs and Cats Homes conference, several of the delegates were approached by a friendly cat who made himself comfortable on the lap of Beni Benstead, manager of the Tyneside Adoption Centre. Venue staff told them that the cat had been hanging around for some time, so the delegates fetched a scanner and checked its microchip. Calling the number it gave them, they found the cat was named Sammy, and had been missing for some months, enabling them to reunite him with his grateful owner. *The Cat, Autumn 2023.*

STUFFED STRIPPER

After Jess Porter-Langson's Roborovski dwarf hamster Hammington, known as Hammy, died, she decided to immortalise him in a unique manner – she spent £175 having him stuffed as a stripper wearing a bright pink thong and dancing round a pole surrounded by money. "He passed away in his sleep just of old age. A good way to go. Not like flying into a blender or something like some people's hamsters," said Porter-Langson, 27. "He was a really big part of my formative life... he needed something special." *lincolnshirelive.co.uk, 15 Jan 2023.*

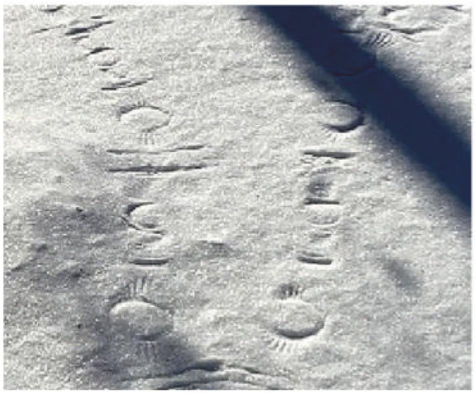

MARTIN ROSS

TRACKS AND TICKS

Mysterious tracks in the snow and a fake African currency on X

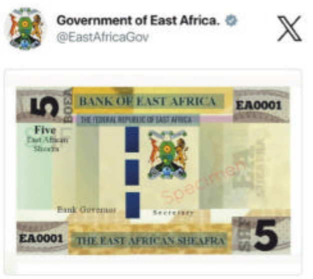
ENIGMATIC TRACKS

In an event reminiscent of the famous "Devil's hoofprints" mystery of 1855 (see **FT70:65**), Janice Heidt-Dubray was visiting a friend's house in Prince Albert, Canada, shortly after a light snow fall, when she noticed a set of bizarre tracks crossing the lawn. "When I first got out of the car I noticed them there," she said. "I thought this is so unusual. They come from her driveway to a point at the sidewalk and then off toward the pathway." Knowing a heavy snowfall was due, she photographed the strange patterns to show her husband. "We looked for similar images online, and we saw some that definitely resembled a bird, but they weren't as intricate as these were." Heidt-Dubray concluded that the tracks were probably made by a magpie because "Just a week or two prior my husband was visiting his mother, and they were looking out the window and they saw a magpie... he said it looked like it was burying something in the snow and it kept going around and around and you could see the wing marks in the snow, so that's what he suspected." However, after seeing the photos, ornithologist Karen Wiebe from the University of Saskatchewan doubted the tracks were created by any kind of bird. "There's no sign of any 'bird footprint tracks', and the snow is quite shallow, so one would expect to see some tracks with this large number of imprints," Wiebe said. "And the round circles with feather-like projections in a long line appear to be too regular to be made by a bird... Also there is a deep divot/bare patch in the middle of the feather circles where the bird's body and feet would have broken through the snow when it lifted off from the ground again... something not apparent in the photos." Commenting that one of her husband's co-workers suggested "homeless aliens", Heidt-Dubray concluded, "Nobody seems to know what caused these." *panow.com, 8 Mar 2024.*


JANICE HEIDT-DUBRAY

LEFT: The strange tracks photographed by Janice Heidt-Dubray. **BELOW**: The fake five sheafra banknote.

She photographed the strange patterns to show her husband


Government of East Africa.
@EastAfricaGov

FUNNY MONEY

Social media across Africa were enthused by an announcement on X (Twitter) from a grey tick account claiming to belong to the 'Government of East Africa'. A grey tick is supposed to indicate an official account of a government or multilateral organisation and is bestowed by X as a sign of legitimacy. The post showed a specimen of what was said to be the new five sheafra banknote, complete with a coat of arms and a space for a signature from a central bank governor. The name sheafra was a combination of "shilling of East Africa" and "franc", two currencies in use in East Africa, and was supposed to herald the introduction of the long-discussed common currency, like Europe's Euro, for the eight country East African Community (EAC). The post swiftly went viral, being viewed more than a million times; major blogs picked it up, and it made headlines on one of Kenya's most popular online media outlets, where it was reported as the launch of a new currency. However, the eight EAC countries – Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda – were quick to dismiss this claim, issuing a statement saying that "the Partner States' journey to a single currency is still a work in progress".

It turns out that "the sheafra" is the brainchild of a Ugandan named Moses Haabwa, the self-styled overseer of the non-existent "Federal Republic of East Africa Government". Haabwa describes himself as a private investigator who has worked in intelligence and says that he has also been appointed ambassador for an unnamed European dukedom. He claims to be leading a group that has been releasing "specimens" of different denominations of the sheafra on social media for three months, although there is no evidence of anyone apart from Haabwa being involved. "The one we released [last Sunday] was the last one we were to post. I didn't tell anyone to tweet that we had 'launched', but how the media picked it [up] we don't know", he said, and explained that part of the reason behind the posts was to offer hope to East Africans that "things can be done." He added that the EAC Secretariat "can't run away from the truth, East Africans want unity." Pressed on whether his actions were legal, Haabwa said, "We are in the process of making these things legal, step by step. Starting from the country we are in." *BBC News, 10 Mar 2024.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

296: PRINCESSES OF WAILS

Although a devout republican, I feel sorry for Kate. Not only, of course, for her illness but for the ridiculous hysteria that greeted her family photograph. Photographers amateur and professional regularly edit their snaps. Why the devil not?

All this nonsense about conspiracies, based on a child's misaligned hands, puts me in mind of this epigram by Thomas Babington Macaulay: "We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality." And editing photos evokes Jane Austen remarking that she "lop't and crop't" *Pride and Prejudice*.

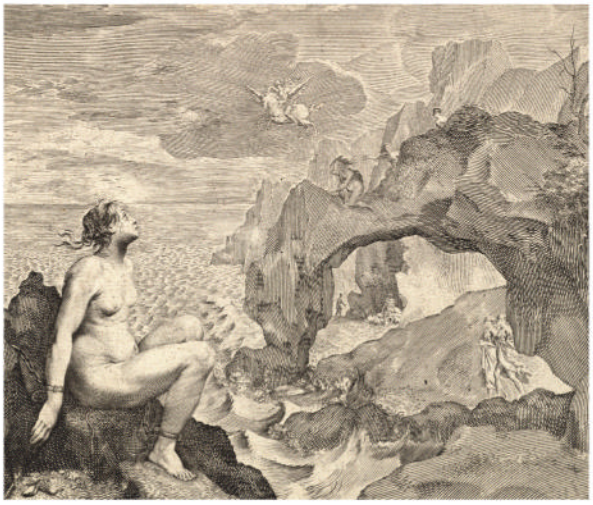
The ancients, of course, had no photos to edit. Their version was in Roman terms known as *Damnatio Memoriiæ*, meaning the chiselling out of a predecessor's name from inscriptions, thus appropriating his/her achievements, along with the full-scale demolition of statues. Although most associated with Roman emperors, this process goes back to Pharaonic Egypt; cf. Richard Wilkinson, '*Damnatio Memoriæ* in the Valley of the Kings' – abstract online from the *Oxford Handbook* (2014) of the same name, pp.335-46.

Describing the sudden fall of Tiberius's all-powerful prætorian prefect Sejanus in AD 31, Juvenal (*Satire* 10, vv61-4) exults thus (Peter Green's Penguin translation):

The head of the people's darling glows red-hot, great Sejanus,
Crackles and melts. That face, only yesterday, ranked
Second in all the world. Now it's so much scrap metal,
To be turned into jugs and basins, frying pans, chamber pots.

Obvious modern comparison is the sudden arrest and liquidation of Stalin's Secret Police boss Lavrenti Beria, and ensuing (as in the case of his many predecessors) toppling of his statues and erasure of him from official photographs, as down the 'Memory Holes' of *1984*.

Princesses do not fare well in Greek literature. Agamemnon was quite prepared to sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia to obtain favourable winds for Troy. Andromeda was chained naked to a rock to be ravaged by a sea serpent (shades of Honeychile Rider in the film version of *Dr No*) to expiate some religious offence – she was rescued by the cavalry in the shape of Perseus on his winged horse Pegasus (once the name of a famous English amateur soccer team). Lower down this lurid chain comes Nausiceia in the *Odyssey*, charged with supervising the slave girls doing the palace laundry – can't see any of our lot wrestling with a box of Tide… Read Robert Graves's *Homer's Daughter* for a delicious re-creation of her, echoing Samuel Butler's idea that the *Odyssey* was composed by a woman – the poem has recently been translated into English for the first time by a woman – Emily Wilson.



LEFT: *Perseus Delivering Andromeda* by Claude Mellan (1598–1688).

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Flashback to Andromeda, who has been an erotic touchstone from ancient to modern times. In Aristophanes's *Frogs* the god Dionysus recalls wanking whilst reading Euripides's eponymous play, since when her chained-to-a-rock image has been appropriated by the songstress Madonna.

From Macedonian real life I single out Thessalonike, sister of Alexander the Great. After his death in 323 BC, so the story went, she jumped grief-stricken into the sea and was transmogrified into a mermaid. Her occupation over the centuries was to ask sailors if Alexander was still alive. If they affirmed this, she granted them safe passage on. If not, she became a raging gorgon who, Godzilla-like, sent them to the bottom of the sea. For more on this rigmarole, see Gwendolyn MacEwen, *Mermaids and Icons: a Greek Summer* (1978), p73.

Kate is for her part no mermaid. Despite all her charms, she remains a Mere-Maid.

A couple of ill-fated Roman princesses. Julia, daughter of Augustus, was exiled by her imperial father to the small desert island of Pandateria for her lurid erotic life. Given his own sexual record, this was a strikingly hypocritical act. Centuries later, Julia was still remembered for her jokes, inventoried by Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, bk 2 ch5, paras1-10. Truth to tell, they are not all that funny – much better ones in the *Philogelos* (Laughter Lover – see my 1983 translation, plus various websites for modern comedians' use of them). Two examples will do – they are all translated in 'Julia's Wit' on the Diotima site. When a friend advised her to copy her father's frugal ways and abandon her licentious public behaviour, she riposted, "He forgets he is Cæsar, but I remember that I am Cæsar's daughter" – this starchy reply is somewhat reminiscent of Princess Anne who, when the Australian Prime Minister enquired after her mother, replied, "She is Not my mother; she is Her Majesty the Queen" – to be fair to Anne, she is also widely credited with coining the word *Naff*.

The second one came when people wondered how, given her promiscuity, all her sons resembled her husband, she quipped, "I never take cargo on board unless the ship is full."

After Julia came Livilla, who conducted an intrigue with the aforementioned Sejanus. When he fell, so did she. According to Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, bk58 ch11, para7, Emperor Tiberius handed her over to her mother, who locked her up in a bedroom and starved her to death – clearly a Roman 'Tiger Mother'…

Space for one Byzantine princess. Step forward Anna Komnena (AD 1083-1153), most famous for writing the *Alexiad*, a biography of her royal father – such literary activity has never been common in the House of Windsor. But she was also famous for punishing her detested husband by a sexual trick which caused him great pain during intercourse – reverse of Mrs Simpson's famous method of delighting Edward VIII.

We shall not further explore this delicate subject…

Kate spero recuperare faciet – ungrammatical Internet Latin (Look It Up) but my sincere wishes to Kate for a complete recovery…

ARCHÆOLOGY

A MONTHLY EXCAVATION OF ODDITIES AND ANTIQUITIES

PAUL SIEVEKING digs up the latest discoveries, incuding ancient wood and some royal skeletons

LEFT: The head of a marble statue of Alexander the Great unearthed in the ruins of a second century theatre in northwest Turkey.

DÜZCE MUNICIPALITY

ALEXANDER STATUE FOUND

Last September, the head of a marble statue of Alexander the Great was unearthed amid the ruins of a second century AD theatre at Konuralp, north of the city of Düzce near Turkey's northwest coast. Alexander the Great died in 323 BC, so the statue may have been made more than 400 years after his death, showing the enduring popularity of the Macedonian warrior. The remains of other marble statues, including heads of the Greek god Apollo and the mythical monster Medusa, were also found in the ruins of the theatre. One reason for Alexander's enduring popularity was that his successors promoted him as an ideal ruler whom they hoped to emulate. It also became common for later rulers to make coins depicting Alexander's image as a way to legitimise their reigns.

"The two tufts of hair in the middle of the forehead, which are separated to the back and sides, are like a lion's mane," according to a statement by Düzce Municipality officials. "This depiction is a hairstyle unique to Alexander the Great." At its height, Alexander's empire stretched from Greece and Egypt to Bactria, roughly in what's now Afghanistan, to the Punjab in what's now Pakistan. But his army refused to go any farther, and Alexander returned to Babylon, where he died – probably from an illness, but possibly from drinking too much or because he was poisoned.

Alexander's habit of shaving his face – as opposed to sporting a beard, like most past rulers did – influenced Roman emperors and led Romans to shave, because it was thought to be the correct thing for rulers to do. Alexander wanted to be seen like the Greek god Apollo, who was portrayed without a beard. For the same reason, many statues of Alexander portrayed him looking upward, toward the gods, as is the case with the Konuralp statue. *livescience.com, 5 Oct 2023.*

> "The two tufts of hair in the middle of the forehead, separated to the back and sides, are like a lion's mane"

ROYAL MACEDONIAN TOMBS

Archæologists say they have unravelled the identities of human remains in an ancient Greek royal tomb that are "among the most historically important" skeletons in Europe. According to a study published in the *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*, the skeletons they investigated belong to the father, the half-brother and the son of Alexander the Great. They were found in the so-called "Great Tumulus" in the vast necropolis of Ægæ – located at Vergina in northern Greece. Ægæ was the first capital of ancient Macedon. The Great Tumulus contains three significant tombs (called Royal Tombs I, II and III) that are thought to date to around the late 4th century BC, but there has been a long-running debate over the identities of the occupants of these tombs.

They were excavated in the 1970s and archæologists subsequently proposed that the tombs contained the burials of Macedonian royals: Alexander the Great's father (Philip II), son (Alexander IV) and half-brother (Arrhidæus Philip III). Researchers originally identified the occupant of Royal Tomb II as that of Philip II, who died in 336 BC. Meanwhile, Tomb I was associated with Arrhidæus and Tomb III with Alexander IV.

In order to shed new light on the burials, a team of researchers studied the skeletal remains, as well as reviewing the available archæological and historical data. These investigations revealed that the male remains in Tomb I actually belong to Philip II. The tomb also contains the remains of a woman and a very young baby, which the researchers concluded were his wife Cleopatra and their newborn child. This fits with historical accounts of the death of Philip, who was assassinated shortly after his wife, Cleopatra, gave birth. Cleopatra and the baby were also killed shortly after.

"First, it was known from the historical sources that Philip II was injured in the eye. The traditional position claimed that there was an eye injury in the male skeleton of Tomb II, meaning the occupant was Philip II. However, we have shown that this notion was based on a description of a non-existent injury in the eye area," said Antonis Bartsiokas, lead author of the study with the Department of History and Ethnology at the Democritus University of Thrace. "Second, there was a fused leg in the male skeleton of Tomb I consistent with the notorious lameness of Philip II. Third, the presence of a newborn in Tomb I confirms the identification Tomb I as that belonging to Philip II because the newborn was the only assassinated newborn known from any royal Macedonian couple. Fourth, the biological age of the female at 18 years old is consistent with that of the last wife of Philip II, Cleopatra – it is known from the ancient sources that she was a young girl when she was assassinated along with her newborn child."

Furthermore, no evidence of trauma was found in the male skeleton of Tomb II, which also contains the remains of a female. Evidence of cremation in the male and female skeletons is consistent with the historic evidence for Arrhidæus. As a consequence, the researchers concluded that Tomb II belongs to King Arrhidæus and his wife Adea Eurydice. Finally, the researchers found no evidence to refute the widely accepted view that Tomb III belongs to Alexander IV. "These conclusions refute the traditional speculation that Tomb II belongs to Philip II," the authors wrote. Given their conclusion that Tomb II belongs to Arrhidæus, not Philip II, the researchers suggest that some of the objects found inside of it, such as the armour, were once the property of Alexander the Great. *newsweek.com, 28 Jan 2024.*

SURPRISINGLY EARLY

A reindeer bone fragment dating back 33,000 years and bearing chop marks from a flint or stone tool has upended previous assumptions that humans first came to Ireland 12,500 years ago. The reindeer bone fragment, found at Castlepook Cave, near Doneraile, in north Cork during naturalist Richard Ussher's excavation of Castlepook Cave between 1904 and 1912, has only recently been radiocarbon-dated. The hind rear reindeer femur contains chop marks consistent with butchering with a flint or stone tool. "This bone just changed Irish human history," said Dr Ruth Carden, one of Ireland's leading consultant zooarchæologists. "We have humans coming into Ireland 33,000 years ago, which changes everything for Ireland and changes north Western Europe as a whole. This research is cutting edge and very exciting as it impacts on how we view humans and animals traversing the lands at that time, and their interactions with each other and past ecosystems." *irishcentral.com, 2 Jan 2024.*

MEGA MEETING HALL

A colossal Bronze Age building, thought to be the fabled meeting hall of King Hinz, a legendary figure purported to be interred in a golden coffin, has been found in Brandenburg, Germany, near the "King's Grave" at Seddin, northwest of Berlin. The grave, discovered in 1899, is considered the most important grave complex of the ninth century BC in northern central Europe. The newly discovered building measures 31m by 10m (102ft by 33ft), its size suggesting it served as a palatial residence. It had walls of wooden planks, wattle and daub, topped with a thatched roof. Due to the estimated building height of seven meters (23ft), it is assumed that there were additional floors for living and storage. *ancient-origins.net, 27 Dec 2023; arkeonews, 5 Feb 2024.*

WORLD'S OLDEST WOODEN STRUCTURE

The discovery of ancient wooden logs in the banks of a river in Zambia (the Kalambo Falls archæological site) in 2019 has changed our understanding of ancient human life. The wood had been used to build a structure almost half a million years ago. The findings, published in *Nature*, suggest stone-age people built what may have been shelters. The researchers also uncovered ancient wooden tools, including digging sticks. But what excited them most were two large interlocking logs, found at right angles to each other with shaped ends and wide, carved notches at the point they overlap. Both logs showed evidence of chopping and scraping, and were buried near tools used for scraping or carving, hand axes and other crafting equipment. Luminescence dating confirmed the logs were about 476,000 years old.

PRIGNITZ DISTRICT

ABOVE: Excavations in Brandenburg, Germany, have revealed a huge Bronze Age building: is it the fabled meeting hall of the legendary King Hinz? **BELOW**: Archæologists examine an ancient wooden structure in Zambia

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Until now, evidence for the human use of wood has been limited to making fire and crafting tools such as digging sticks and spears. One of the oldest wooden discoveries was a 400,000-year-old spear in prehistoric sands at Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, in 1911 – although the earliest known example of modified wood is a polished plank from Israel dating to around 780,000 years ago.

Unless it is preserved in very specific conditions, wood simply rots away. But in the meandering riverbanks above the Kalambo Falls, close to the Zambia-Tanzania border, it was waterlogged and essentially pickled for millennia. The size of the two logs, the smaller of which is about 1.5m (5ft), suggests whoever fitted them together was building something substantial. Unlikely to have been a hut or permanent dwelling, it could have formed part of a platform for a shelter, a raised walkway, a place to store wood or somewhere to sit.

It is unclear what species of ancient human – or hominid – built it. No bones have been found at this site so far. And the timber is much older than the earliest modern human – or *Homo sapiens* – fossils, which are about 315,000 years old. "It could have been *Homo sapiens* and we just haven't discovered fossils from that age yet," University of Aberystwyth archæologist Prof Geoff Duller said. "But it could be a different species – *Homo erectus* or *Homo naledi* – there were a number of hominid species around at that time in southern Africa." *Homo heidelbergensis*, for example... *BBC News, sciencenews.org, 20 Sept 2023.*

Cloak and dagger

DAVID HAMBLING tells how an Above Top Secret US aircraft gave rise to a 1990s UFO sighting

A new Pentagon report reveals that a UFO sighting from the1990s was actually of a classified aircraft. No great surprise there; for decades, successive generations of so-called ‘black’ aircraft have been generating UFO reports. What makes this one different is that 30 or so years later the aircraft in question still has not been revealed. Based on the available information, though, it might be possible to make an educated guess at what secret technology might be involved.

The incident is mentioned in a 6 March report by the US Department of Defense’s All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO), set up to investigate what were formerly known as UFOs and are now called UAP or ‘Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena.’ The report covers historical sightings previously investigated by Government agencies and has two main thrusts: establishing whether any of them might be of extraterrestrial origin, and exploring the persistent popular belief that the Pentagon, NASA or private industry has captured remains of alien spacecraft and is reverse-engineering the technology.

The report gives a resounding “No” to each of these questions, finding no evidence either of extraterrestrial sightings or recovered alien technology. It goes painstakingly through many rumours and reports and tracks down the evidence behind them. The researchers were immensely helped by having full access to classified information that outside investigators would never see.

The researchers went as far as obtaining a sample of an alloy acquired by the US Army claimed by some to be from a flying saucer. They determined the alloy of magnesium, zinc and bismuth was “manufactured, terrestrial alloy and does not represent off-world technology or possess any exceptional qualities.”

So far, so dull. Such denials will not sway true believers or conspiracy theorists who will conclude that the samples were switched and the *real* alien alloy is still in a secret vault somewhere, and that the true stories behind sightings are being covered up.

The study noted that a UFO report from a US miliary facility in the 1990s with a “peculiar flight pattern” could be linked directly with a specific aircraft project.

“The seemingly strange characteristics reported by the interviewee match closely with the platform’s characteristics, which was being tested at a military facility in the time frame the interviewee was there,” states the report, adding, “This program is not related in any way to the exploitation of off-world technology.”

LEFT: Spy planes like the SR-71 Blackbird may have produced numerous ‘UFO sightings’.

USAF / JUDSON BROHMER / ARMSTRONG PHOTO GALLERY

Their off-the-record assessment was an aircraft with a layer of plasma around it

The aircraft was part of a Special Access Program, this being a level of security above Top Secret with information only made available to specific individuals.

The AARO report lists historic secret aircraft which are believed to have produced UFO reports before they were revealed, including the high-altitude U-2 spy plane and its successor the Mach 3 Blackbird. Because the U-2 flew higher than any known aircraft, and the Blackbird faster than any known aircraft, sightings may have been dismissed as UFOs.

The last classified aircraft to be unveiled was the Tacit Blue, a stealthy reconnaissance plane that was flight-tested briefly in the 1980s but not revealed until 1996, 11 years after it had been retired. Tacit Blue did have a ‘flying saucer’ profile, so might have confused observers from a specific angle, but the timeline does not match up.

The AARO report does not divulge details of the sighting or of what made the classified aircraft look like something from another world. Recent miliary UAP sightings have included objects that have accelerated at hundreds of g, travelled at incredible speed with no supersonic boom, or which could vanish from sight – effects still impossible with known technology.

One technology might fit. On 24 July 1991 two plane spotters set up their camera by Highway 58 near Edwards Air Force Base in California. Around 1am they spotted a glowing object coming out of the West. It was shaped like a pencil, surrounded by a glowing white layer and a layer of gold over that, and was shedding a trail of glowing blobs as it went.

The object, nicknamed ‘the Dripper,’ disappeared as rapidly as it had arrived. The spotters quickly ruled out their first assumption, that it might be a meteor, which it resembled. They showed their video to some Cal Tech scientists, whose off-the-record assessment was that the Dripper was an aircraft with a layer of plasma around it that was constantly being shed. Plasma, charged gas, is present in neon lights, lightning and the surface of the Sun, and emits a visible glow.

Injecting plasma into the air flowing around an aircraft reduces drag, and this could be used to increase speed or to provide a means of steering with no moving surfaces. Plasma also absorbs radio waves. There have been several projects to develop plasma ‘cloaking devices’ to make aircraft invisible to radar, while lighting them up like neon signs. The Russians are believed to have tested a plasma stealth system on their MiG 1.44 prototype, which never went into production. Back in the 1960s the US even experimented with painting a U-2 spy plane with radioactive Polonium paint; at high altitudes where the pressure is low, the radioactivity would generate a layer of cloaking plasma.

Plasma is far less effective than other radar reduction techniques, such as using radar absorbing material or shapes, though, and plasma aerodynamics have made little progress in the last two decades. It seems likely that the Dripper’s plasma technology, whatever it was, was not sufficiently mature to progress. But it may have shown enough promise to remain classified until further breakthroughs would make it viable.

The 1990s timeline appears to make the Dripper the most likely candidate for the AARO UFO report, although until they are able to provide more details this is speculation. All we know is that the military have some aircraft which appear to be, but are not, otherworldly. The truth, whatever it is, is still out there.

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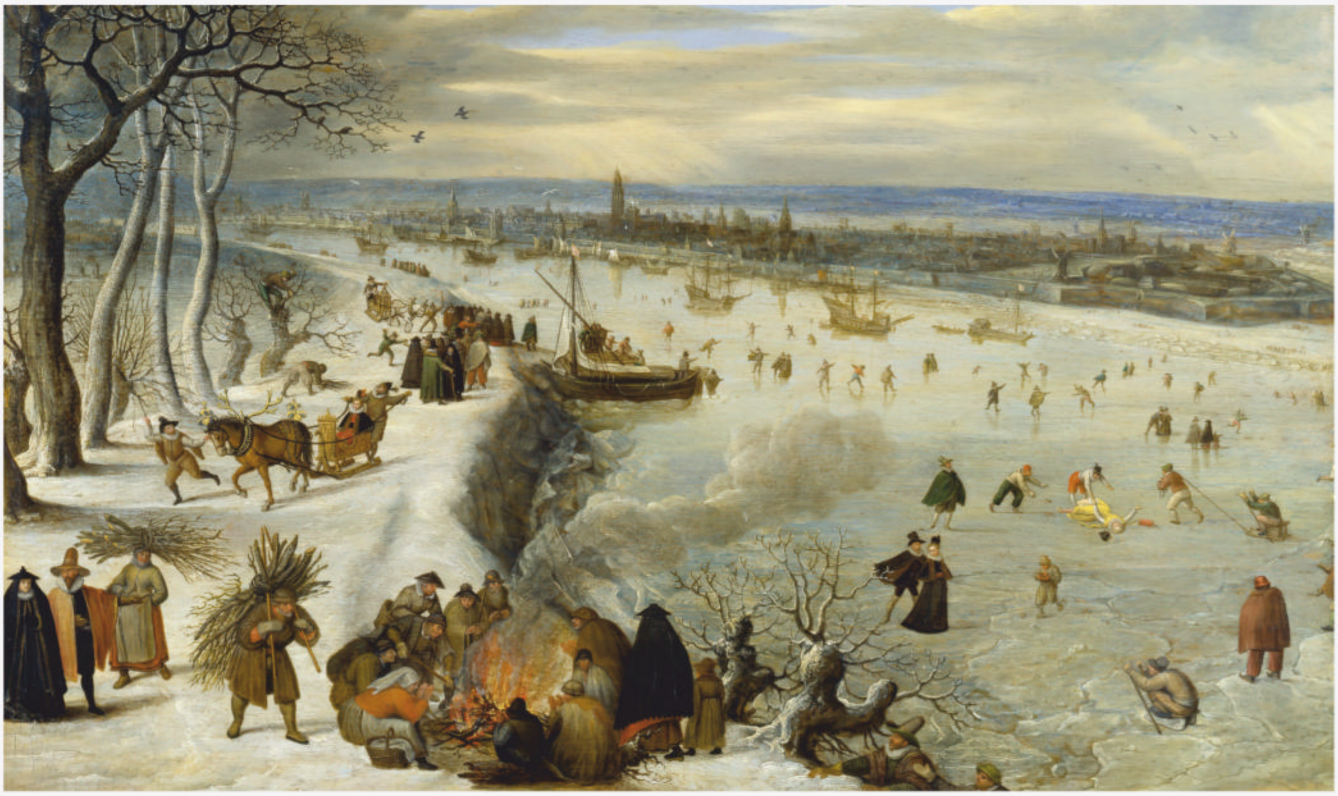
Ghosts of the great outdoors

ALAN MURDIE argues that not all ghosts are haunted house-bound, as three recent stories show



STÄDEL MUSEUM, FRANKFURT AM MAIN

ABOVE: Even in the Little Ice Age of the 17th century, people headed outdoors. **BELOW**: The late Dr Gillian Bennett pondered the physical locations of ghosts.

On learning of the sad news of the death of the folklorist and contemporary legend scholar Dr Gillian Bennett (1939-2023) at the end of last year I was reminded of her study *Alas, Poor Ghost! Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse* (1999), examining the locations where ghosts manifest.

Exploring the language and words used in witnesses' accounts and narratives, she argued that ghosts are inextricably linked with the physicality of haunted houses, being concentrated in particular parts of a property. A lexical analysis revealed certain words repeatedly cropping up in stories about hauntings. Aside from the word "house" itself, common words were "go", "attic", "stairs", "door", "somebody", "cellar", "nightmare", "family" and "disappear".

She concluded: "Haunted places are thus seen to be no-go areas such as cellars and attics, or betwixt-and between places such as stairs and doorways." Commenting on this consistency in stories, she said: "One explanation... might be that these actually are the typical contexts for paranormal experiences (though why this should be so is a question that needs to be answered). Alternatively, this interpretation might be reversed by saying that these sorts of locations, being the stuff of thousands of ghost stories, will predispose susceptible people to see ghosts there."

It must have been warmer than sitting in the house, with no proper glazing, rickety shutters and smoky fires

DR GILLIAN BENNETT

Of course, it is not always the case that ghosts confine themselves to indoors. Though we typically speak of 'haunted houses' – and poltergeists are usually domestic – both today and historically in Europe they are often encountered outdoors, singly or in large numbers. These occur especially in stories from before the Reformation, though I would suggest there may be a very simple reason in that in the past people often lived a lot more of their lives outside, both working and playing, than is common today. Even in the coldest months of the European winter, the seasonal time for ghosts and spirits, the inclination was to head outside.

Looking at the snowy scenes of 17th century artists, the painters depict everyone in frantic exercise outdoors, even during the grip of what we call in climatic terms 'the Little Ice Age'. This was because often it must have been warmer than sitting in the house, with no proper glazing, rickety shutters and miserable, smoky fires. The dire state of many poorer dwellings was encapsulated in a famed speech by William Pitt the Elder, opining the legal principle 'An Englishman's Home is his Castle': "The poorest man may in his cottage bid defiance to all the force of the Crown. It may be frail; its roof may shake; the wind may blow through it; the storms may enter; the rain may enter – but the King of England cannot enter; all his forces dare not cross the threshold of the ruined tenement."

With so much of life conducted outdoors the chances of seeing a ghost in the open air accordingly increased. This is also demonstrated in warmer climes today, where one is far more likely to be engage in alfresco living during the course of the year, producing a higher level of ghostly encounters beyond the threshold of the home. This is demonstrated with three recent stories.

"Is this green glow a ghost? You be the judge," asked the *Australian South Coast Register* on 24 September 2023 about a strange manifestation reported by people attending a bonfire held on private land on the shores of Lake George. An image variously called "weird green haze in the elm tree" and "a bizarre green blob" was captured by Scott Mitchell on his mobile phone. "A glowing green mass emerged from a group of elm trees then, as if sucked into the plume of smoke, shot up like a rocket into the sky along with embers in the flame," said a perplexed Mr Mitchell. "It was eerie... Did we witness some sort of unusual natural phenomena, like swamp gas?" he asked. "Some who are into the paranormal even speculated it could have been some sort of ghost."

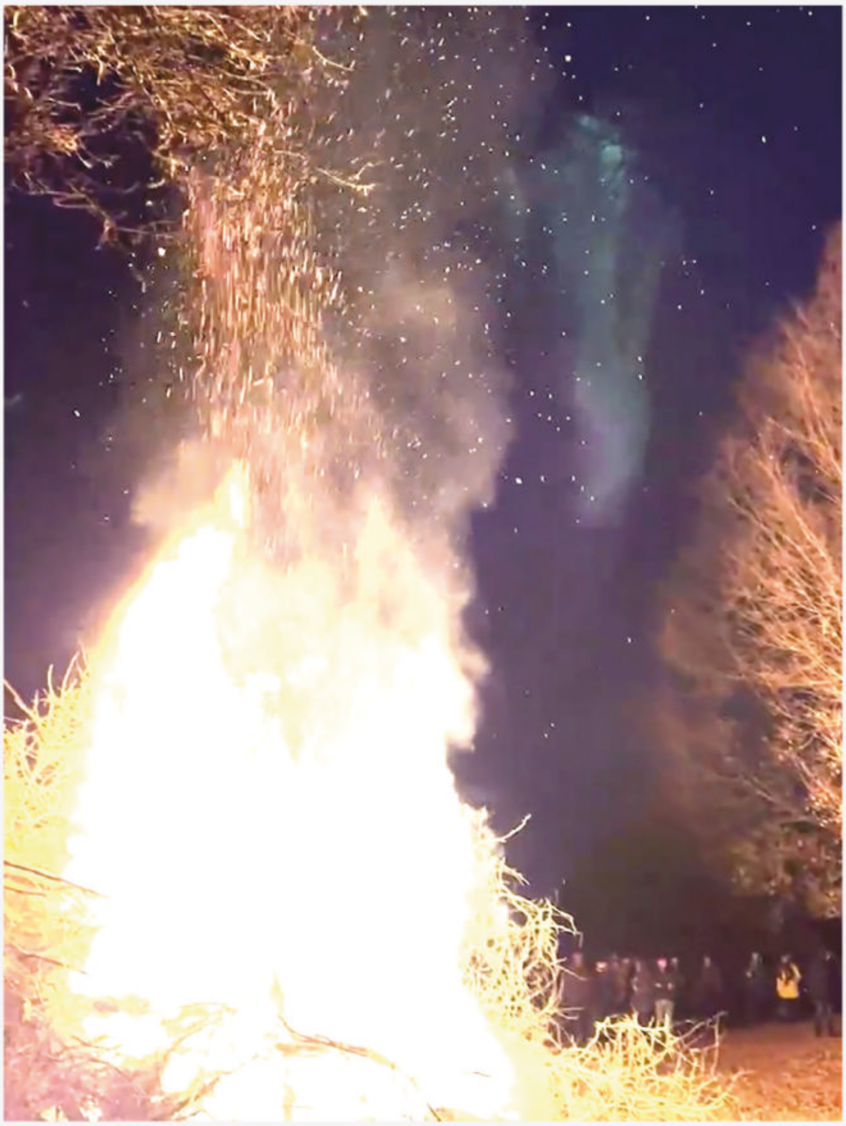
His pictures have gained an added notoriety from unusual stories already in circulation from the Lake George area concerning Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAPs) sightings, formerly UFOs. Occurring near the water's edge, these are typically described as "a bright yellow light emerging from the mist". In 1996, a mother and her daughter witnessed two UAPs/UFOs land in a paddock adjacent to the lake. The mother reported how the object, which "hovered above their car, emitted a number of sparks underneath it", and described it as "large and with rows of coloured lights".

Natural causes have been postulated (e.g. the planet Venus or the lights of a nearby sand mine). Mirages and other unusual atmospheric phenomena have been seen locally since the 19th century. Meanwhile, expert opinion is divided over Scott's images. An unnamed professor has commented: "There are many factors (natural and man-made) that can cause fires to exhibit unusual characteristics... Copper and borax (used to treat ants) can cause green flames, but the flames here don't appear to be green, just the smoke."

Optical mechanic Geoff Kemp dismisses the video, putting it down to an extreme form of lens flare, saying: "There is nothing mysterious at all," and "The spectre matches exactly the flames upside-down and reversed and moves with the camera in the opposite direction."

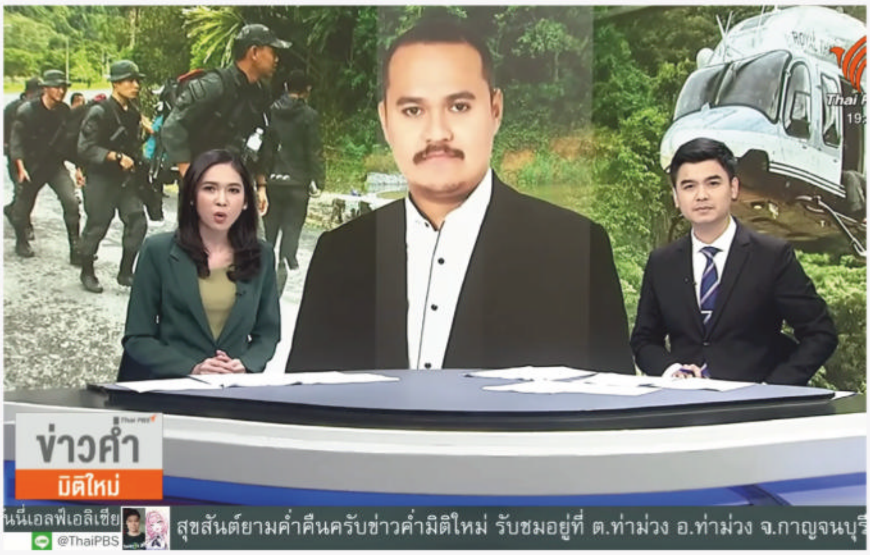
Expanding on this, Mr Kemp maintains: "The colour is caused by the anti-reflective coating on the lens, like the blue-red-green when you look at a camera lens. There's a vacuum coating on glass of various metal layers, only atoms thick, that reduces reflections but not entirely, as is exhibited here in this very high-contrast scene."

What this does not account for was that people on the opposite side of the fire from where Scott was filming also noticed a strange glow. The colour might be traced to chemicals of some kind burning in the fire, but since it appears to have been visible to people not looking through a lens, or camera, it suggests the green haze was objective



ABOVE: The "green glow ghost" of Lake George, New South Wales, captured by Scott Mitchell.

SCOTT MITCHELL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TOP: A Thai news report on the ongoing manhunt for escaped criminal Chaowalit Thongduang (the large chap in the middle). **ABOVE**: Ton Tok falls; police stationed here reported paranormal experiences.

CELESTINE DAGLI / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

and optical and not purely a subjective illusion or camera artefact. I would venture to suggest that the boundaries of modern physics might shed some insights on the persistent appearances of strange lights and glows recorded around the world over generations, if they cannot be ascribed to camera artefacts or trick of the light.

Far more disturbing experiences apparently beset a team of police officers in Thailand engaged in a manhunt for an escaped criminal in November 2023. They came out of a dense forest, badly shaken by manifestations they attributed to a ghost of a recently deceased woman. Their quarry was a gang leader named Chaowalit Thongduang who had originally escaped from a 20-year sentence imposed for attempting to free a fellow gang member from custody. Thongduang then fled to a hideout in the Bhanthat mountains in Trang province. After being tracked by police, he disappeared into the jungle after a gun battle. Thongduang is also accused of killing a policeman and two other attempted murders and whilst on the run he had been issuing taunting video messages directed at the authorities.

Teams of police, operating in shifts, pursued Thongduang deeper into the forest as far as a spot identified as the Ton Tok waterfall. However, when it came to the point in the manhunt for relieving the initial police team with swap shifts, those emerging and descending from their post in the hills relayed two nights of horrifying paranormal experiences while camped out. Though precise details of the manifestations were not released, one Trang-based police officer revealed that the dense forest was ‘notoriously haunted‘ and that the officers affected were not alone in encountering uncanny phenomena.

Interviewed by the Thai news publication *Thaiger*, a 63-year-old local villager named Somporn (or Go Daeng) attributed the haunting to the recent death of a woman who lived in Nayong district. Along with her husband, she had worked as a rubber tapper in the forest and been killed there, crushed by constriction in an attack by a giant python over five metres (16ft) long. In her hand she still clutched a rubber tapping knife, and there were signs of a struggle to the death between her and the snake, which lay expired next to her. After this, locals shunned the forest, averring it was haunted, with no one daring to tap rubber or stay after dark, until the police arrived to conduct their operation.

The officer in charge vowed that any future police teams assigned to the area would not sleep there, due to the terrifying experiences endured. In passing, I note that a spectral manifestation by someone who dies suddenly or unexpectedly is consistent with findings from psychical research (noted for example, in *The Departed Among the Living: An Investigative Study of Afterlife Encounters* (2012) by Erlendur Haraldsson; ‘Thoughts on the Decline of Major Paranormal Phenomena’ by Ian Stevenson (1990) *Proceedings* vol 57 1984-1993, 149-162). (Source: ‘Ghostly encounters add chilling twist to Chaowalit manhunt in Thailand forest’, *Thaiger*, 16 Nov 2023.)

Rather than avoid one haunted highway in California, people flock to a winding road by a ravine, with a steep drop down to a creek, despite its recognised hazards, encouraged by a now 75-year-old claim of its ghost being photographed. The *SFGate* news website based in San Francisco hails a lonely seven-mile (11km) stretch of Niles Canyon Road in the Bay Area as the scene of an “urban legend that won’t die”. Many fatalities have occurred on the road, listed as the Bay Area’s deadliest road in 2017, averaging about 22 crashes a year. Numerous homicide victims have also been found dumped near this notorious highway.

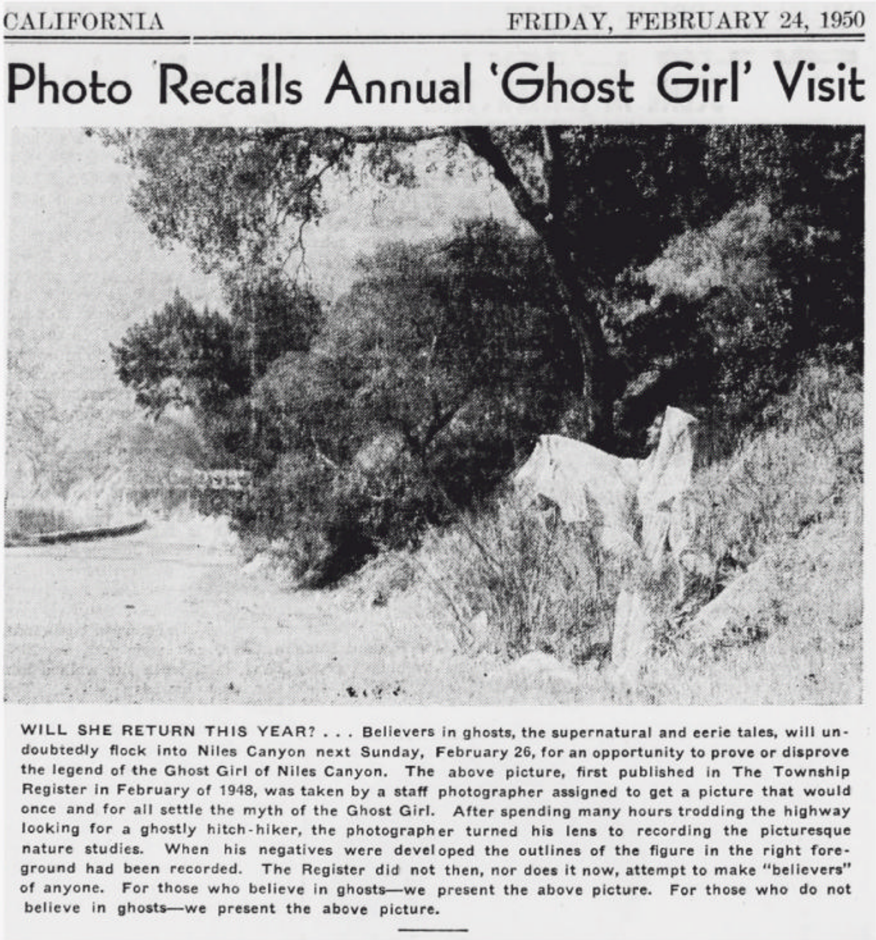
Legend holds that an apparition known as ‘Ghost Girl” or the ‘White Witch’ appears every 26 or 28 February, seeking to hitch a lift. “Credence ranges from those who openly scoff to those who fear to drive through the canyon on February twenty-sixth,” according to David Mostar author of a local history book, *The History of Washington Township* (2012). The story dates back at least 80 years, with the first claimed encounter being in either 1938 or 1940 in the Niles area. Supposedly, a girl who died in a car accident materialises in the back seats of cars, attempting to ride back to the city and vanishing upon reaching Dumbarton Bridge. People hunt for her on the alleged anniversary of her death. However, neither her precise identity nor claimed accident have been pinpointed, taking us into the realm of the legendary phantom hitch-hiker, spectral pedestrians and ubiquitous White Ladies recorded in contemporary and ancient lore (see: *The Evidence for Phantom Hitch-hikers* by Michael Goss (1984, 2015) and with some alleged appearances blamed on pranksters.

Two aspects of this tale stand out. Firstly, there is the claimed photograph, which helped create the on-going sensation. It was reportedly obtained in February 1948 by a photographer from the Washington Township Register, hoping to capture the Ghost Girl's annual appearance.

Allegedly, he saw nothing while taking pictures but when one image was developed, "he was stunned to find an ethereal young woman in one of them, draped in white and gazing ahead into nothingness." The picture was published in 1948 and again on 24 February 1950. It fails to convince, even presuming a less visually sophisticated audience three quarters of a century ago, seeming staged and stilted, ascribable to a newspaper hoax and with marks suggestive of a steam iron in the gown or robe of the 'ghost'. However, such flaws do not detract from the iconic status that alleged anomalous photographs can acquire, inspiring a fascination for them spanning generations (e.g. the Cottingley fairies). Mere reports of a dodgy or missing photograph or film – even garbled tales of wholly non-existent films or pictures – have the power to spark intense curiosity and fixation, setting individuals off on years of heroic and admirable, but frequently fruitless, questing to discover 'the truth' (e.g. the alleged Dr MacRae films at Loch Ness and Loch Duich and the elusive 'Thunderbird' photograph).

The second feature is the existence of an identifiable witness who claims a personal sighting, a rarity for an urban legend and these kinds of encounters. In 1979, around 3am one morning, Daniel Meseke, 19, was driving home in his yellow Toyota on the unlit road, having just finished a 12-hour shift as a mechanic. He was travelling at double the speed limit and as he careered toward a sharp turn, he saw a shimmer of light in his rear-view mirror and felt a firm grasp on his shoulder that forced him to slam on the brakes.

It seems he identified this with the presence of an entity in his car. "I knew somebody was there and somebody squeezed my shoulder to tell me to slow down," he recalled for the press, a story he has told many times in the 45 years since. Halting in the middle of the road, his headlights illuminated the jagged canyon walls just feet away from his car, he turned round to look at his saviour: he found nothing but an empty back seat. Now 65, Meseke declares: "I'm not a person who believes in ghosts or anything, but it made me a believer that something out there saved my life." Reflecting on his experience, he says "To this day, I believe there is somebody out there." (Sources: www.sfgate.com/local/article/bay-area-niles-canyon-road-ghost-18684782.php; *East Bay Times*, 26 Feb 2007.)



CALIFORNIA FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1950

Photo Recalls Annual 'Ghost Girl' Visit

WILL SHE RETURN THIS YEAR? . . . Believers in ghosts, the supernatural and eerie tales, will undoubtedly flock into Niles Canyon next Sunday, February 26, for an opportunity to prove or disprove the legend of the Ghost Girl of Niles Canyon. The above picture, first published in The Township Register in February of 1948, was taken by a staff photographer assigned to get a picture that would once and for all settle the myth of the Ghost Girl. After spending many hours trodding the highway looking for a ghostly hitch-hiker, the photographer turned his lens to recording the picturesque nature studies. When his negatives were developed the outlines of the figure in the right foreground had been recorded. The Register did not then, nor does it now, attempt to make "believers" of anyone. For those who believe in ghosts—we present the above picture. For those who do not believe in ghosts—we present the above picture.

ABOVE: The supposed photo of the Niles Canyon 'Ghost Girl' reproduced in a 1950 newspaper.

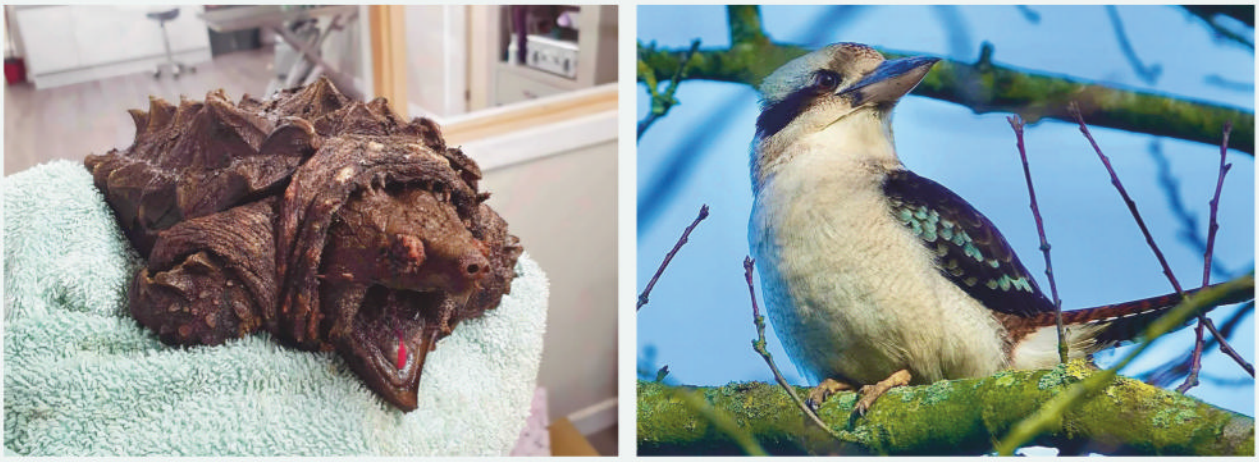
"I'm not a believer in ghosts, but it made me a believer that something out there saved my life"

It might be postulated that the combination of the dangers of a treacherous highway, the awesome impression of jagged rocks and towering mountains, or an eerie and isolated environment like a Thai forest at night, might work to exert an influence upon strained individuals, encouraging them to misinterpret natural stimuli and to hallucinate seeing or sensing the presence of a ghost.

Yet taking ourselves back to our starting point, while such a hypothesis might account for apparitions in remote regions, it doesn't really explain Gillian Bennett's observation about manifestations focusing in certain parts of domestic dwellings. For an ordinary balanced individual walking up one flight of stairs or passing from one room to another in the average domestic dwelling is hardly comparable to being thrust into a strange or hostile environment, exposing one to natural or man-made hazards. Thus, in finding answers we need to enquire and test whether certain locations, spots and areas within homes or other locations are peculiarly conducive to psi experiences, whether spontaneous in nature or those arising in controlled experiments.

ALIEN ZOO NEWS FROM THE CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL GARDEN

KARL SHUKER shares news of a pair of surprising UK visitors and hope for the Javan tiger


WILD SIDE VET

ALLEGRA LOCH

ABOVE LEFT: A fearsome-looking Fluffy. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Suffolk's unexpected kookaburra, photographed by local wildlife enthusiast Allegra Loch.

HEADLESS IN HAYBURN WYKE

During mid-January 2024, the media carried a number of reports appertaining to a very large decomposed carcase discovered and photographed on a remote beach at Hayburn Wyke, near Scarborough in North Yorkshire, by rockpool explorer Caroline Pindar. Even though it was both headless and tailless, the carcase still measured some 16ft (4.8m) in length, and appeared to possess throat pleats like those characterising baleen whales. Also, among the bones visibly protruding through the dead creature's white stringy skin (exposed connective tissue fibres), a pair of bones recognised by some cetacean experts as the radius and ulna of a whale flipper could be clearly perceived. The consensus, therefore, is that it was a common (northern) minke whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata. www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-12968307/Mysterious-faceless-seabeast-leaves-locals-BAFFLED-washes-beach-Yorkshire.*

SNAPPER SNAPPED

On 5 February 2024, parish councillor Denise Chamberlain was walking her dog by Urswick Tarn, a lake near Ulverston in Cumbria, northern England, when she saw a very unusual creature there. With the aid of a shopping basket and three very thick pairs of builder's gloves (a necessity indicated by the size and ferocity of its jaws), she was able to capture and transport it to the local veterinary surgery at Barrow-in-Furness. There it was identified and photographed by vet Dr Dominic Moule as an alligator snapping turtle *Macrochelys temminckii*, or snapper for short, which is native to swamps and rivers in the southern USA, but is often kept here in Britain as an exotic pet. Drolly nicknamed Fluffy, despite possessing a bite so powerful that it can crunch through solid bone, the animal is believed to be five to six years old, and probably proved too much of a handful for its unknown original owner, and was therefore released into the lake. This daunting species can grow up to 40in (1m) long and weigh up to 175lb (79kg) – though occasional specimens much bigger than this have been documented – and can live for up to 70 years in captivity, probably even longer in the wild. *www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-68250382; www.itv.com/news/granada/2024-02-11/invasive-alligator-snapping-turtle-found-in-cumbria-and-named-fluffy-by-vets.*

The alligator snapping turtle is native to swamps and rivers in the southern USA

KOOKABURRA IN SUFFOLK

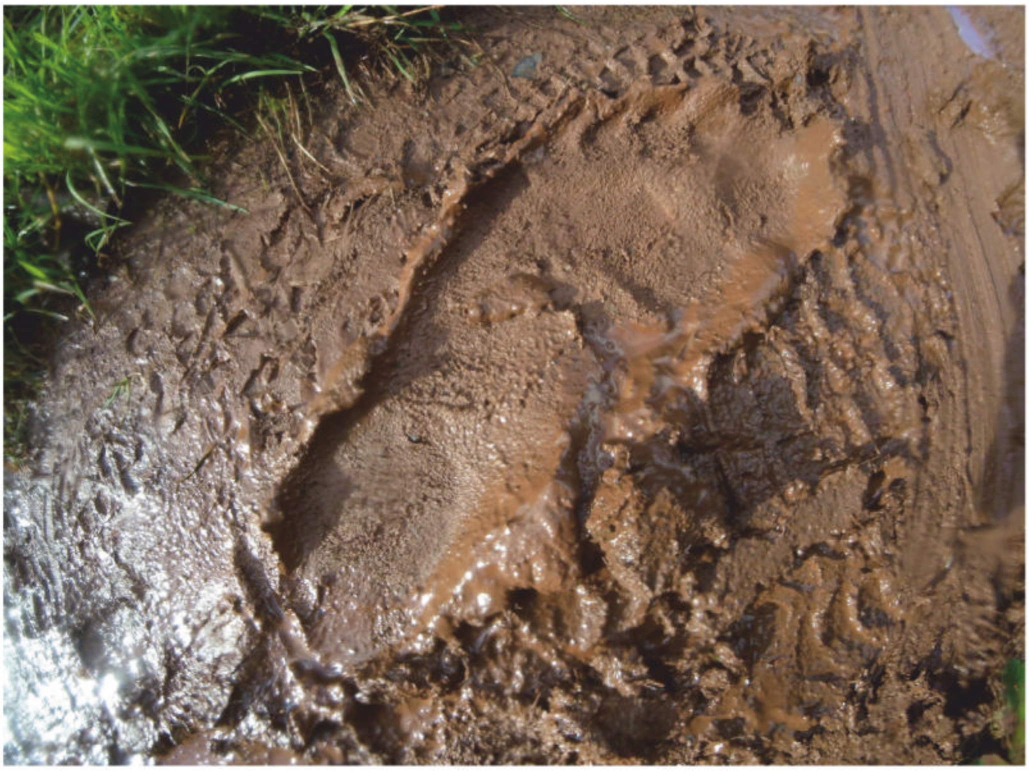
Scarcely a week after Fluffy's debut in Cumbria was attracting media headlines, so too was another unexpected foreign interloper in Britain, but this time it was a kookaburra *Dacelo gigas*, sighted and photographed near Sudbury in Suffolk, eastern England. Also known as the laughing jackass on account of its famous call, this is an Australian species of large forest-dwelling kingfisher. According to Jack Cripps of Suffolk Wildlife Trust, moreover, what is believed to be the same specimen was first reported here about nine years previously, but no one knows where it came from (though as specimens are quite commonly maintained in captivity, this is probably an escapee). However, it seems to have adapted well to its English environment and as its species can live up to 20 years in the wild, it may continue to be an intriguing sight in this Suffolk locality for quite some years to come. *www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-suffolk-68345409*

HAIR OF THE TIGER?

Traditionally classified as a distinct subspecies, *Panthera tigris sondaica* (although some modern-day taxonomists dispute this), the Javan tiger was officially deemed extinct in 2008, but occasional unconfirmed sightings have been made during that period. In 2019, moreover, not only a sighting (in a community plantation close to Cipendeuy, a village in the forest of South Sukabumi, West Java) but also the procurement on a fence nearby of a single supposed tiger hair occurred. The hair has been subjected to comparative genetic analyses, focusing upon its cytochrome b mitochondrial DNA (mDNA) gene sequence. The newly published results in the conservation journal *Oryx* reveal that its mDNA for the above-noted gene sequence compares very closely indeed in terms of genetic distance to mDNA in samples obtained from a preserved museum specimen of Javan tiger. Conversely, it differs markedly from mDNA obtained from Bengal tiger, Sumatran tiger, Siberian (Amur) tiger, and Javan leopard. This yields the best indication to date that at least one bona fide Javan tiger may indeed still survive in its island homeland. *www.cambridge.org/core/journals/oryx/article/is-the-javan-tiger-panthera-tigris-sondaica-extant-dna-analysis-of-a-recent-hair-sample/5F407FD1D97836F8C26DE46CCFA08D73*

PUTTING THEIR FOOT IN IT

British Bigfoot is back, with multiple prints sparking a cryptozoological film turf war

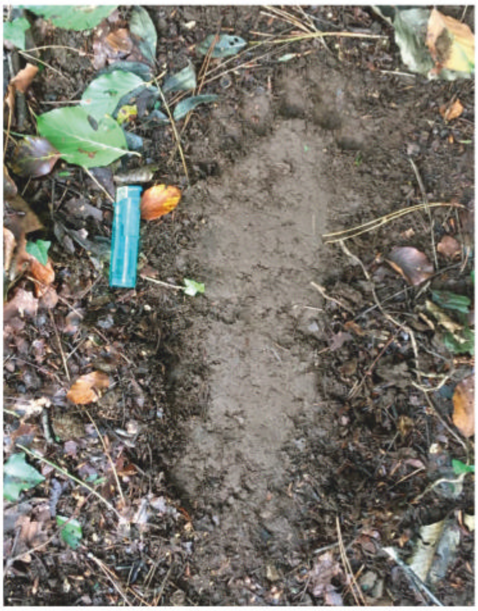

ZIGGY AUSTIN / SWNS

ABOVE: Teacher Ziggy Austin, who was leading a coasteering group, spotted this outsized footprint while leading a group of walkers in Devon. **BELOW:** The 16-inch print allegedly found by filmmaker Jason Kenzie in woods near Caerphilly in Wales.

While Bigfoot is commonly imagined to be a thoroughly North American phenomenon, there is a surprisingly strong tradition of ape men in Britain. They have been sighted near Newcastle at Bolam Lake, on Ben MacDhui in Scotland, where there is the legend of the Old Grey Man, and in Suffolk, where tales of feral Wodewose abound; one allegedly “terrified builders” in Sproughton, and mediæval fishermen are recorded as having caught a hairy wildman swimming in the sea off Orford (see p42). There have been many encounters across Britain, going back centuries, and while some claims may well be down to investigators with overactive imaginations, ape-men are firmly established British cryptids (see Stu Neville, “The Bigfeet of Britain, **FT425:30-36**). It seems, too, that they have no intention of fading into history.

In March, walkers on the Maidencombe coast path in Torquay, Devon, claimed to have discovered “mysterious” giant footprints emerging from the woods at Watcombe, imprinted in the mud of the path. The group, consisting of 20 people out hiking with Rock Solid Coasteering, say they were all “weirded out” by the discovery. A member of the group said that the footprints appeared to have been left by something that came out of the woods and followed the coast path for about 20 metres before veering off back into the trees. The group photographed a print, although with nothing alongside to give it scale, but one of the walkers said: “The prints were big. I’m a size 11 and they were half as big again. Clearly a bare foot, every print was perfect like the one in the photo.”

Torquay has form when it comes to ape-men; in 1996 there was a six-week run of sightings of an ape-like creature in Churston Woods between Paignton and Torquay during which it was reported by 15 separate witnesses. The creature was said to be approximately five feet (1.5m) tall and covered in brown hair, with a green face but no tail. Two of the witnesses reported seeing it swinging from tree branches “with tremendous agility”. At the time, Jon Downes, Director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, said: “I have many similar reports of such creatures being seen in Devonshire woodland. And this one is a real cracker because it has so much separate and credible corroboration to it.”


TIM WHITTARD / SWNS

In November, while filming a new TV series, Canadian Bigfoot researcher Jason Kenzie turned up evidence for what he believes is a Bigfoot presence in woods near Caerphilly in Wales. He claims his team found 16in (40cm) long footprints and a primitive lair in woodland near the town and glimpsed “a 6ft 7in (2m) being” that Kenzie believes is responsible. After examining the prints, he pronounced that “It could possibly be a Sasquatch footprint… based on the size alone, it does look closer to an unknown creature than a typical human.” However, rival cryptozoological filmmaker Andy McGrath was less than convinced, saying, “You can’t imagine my surprise when I saw the news… they had used the joke footprint that we made while filming a comedy segment about Brenin Llwyd [a Welsh wildman] on Caerphilly Mountain.” He also claimed that his team had made the supposed Bigfoot lair as part of their project. “I can’t imagine how they got leaked out, but they certainly weren’t meant to be taken seriously. I definitely believe that Bigfoot exists somewhere out there in the wider world, but these footprints are about as genuine as a £9 note!” McGrath concluded. *dailymail.co.uk, 3 Mar 2024; devonlive.com, 8 Oct 2022; walesonline.co.uk, 12 Nov 2023.*

STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN rounds up the Euro-weirdness, from a modern day Flying Dutchman to some monster eels

GHOST SHIPS

On 6 November 2023, a mysterious sailing boat beached on the Weststrand on the German East Frisian island of Norderney and caused quite a sensation. It looked like a prop from a Hollywood pirate movie – the self-built boat was certainly no normal affair. It was rumoured that no one was on board, as a mysterious ship without any lights had repeatedly been seen near the island of Juist over the past few weeks. The beached "phantom boat" attracted large crowds of sightseers who wondered where it had come from.

However, this modern mystery was soon solved. The captain came forward, a 70-year-old man from Freiburg, Germany, who had been intermittently living alone on his ship, the *Wibo*, for 17 years while sailing the North Sea. The boat was quite derelict even before he stranded on the island on his way from Hooksiel near Cuxhaven to the islands of Spiekeroog and Juist. The skipper at first refused assistance and was unwilling to leave his ship, but finally agreed to have the vessel salvaged on 10 November. The skipper will have to pay for the salvage, which he thought unnecessary, said police spokeswoman Wiebke Baden. There is still dispute as to who is responsible, water police or the island's administration, but all agree that the ship is no longer in safe or seaworthy condition. It was transported to the Toy Museum at Norden where it will be exhibited. *ndr.de, stuttgarter-nachrichten.de, 10 Nov; butenunbinnen.de, 22 Nov 2023.*

NRDNY NORDERNEY / FACEBOOK

LEFT: The *Wibo*, the mysterious 'ghost ship' that beached on Norderney.

Early in February 2024, a French fisherman discovered a sailing yacht without a crew cruising off Audierne near Brest in Brittany. The deserted ship had lost its rigging and was heading for the coast. The fisherman alarmed CROSS Corsen, the maritime Monitoring and Rescue Centre of northern Brittany, who sent out a patrol boat to investigate. They found the yacht was the *Heidi*, with a Norwegian owner who had been in an accident in early November when he was caught by Hurricane Ciarán while 700 miles (1,127km) off the British coast. The source does not state this, but I assume the man was rescued and the yacht sailed on without him until it was found. *segelreporter.com, 7 Feb 2024.*

MONSTER EELS

We stay in the North Sea and in Norway. On 8 October 2023, Norwegian angler Henrik Sten Gran caught "a giant eel, one of the largest congers ever caught in Norway" in the Atlantic Ocean off Bergen. The animal was 2.10m (7ft) long and weighed 29.7kg (65lb) – a "real sea-serpent" according to the press. Gran's angling companion, fellow countryman Artur Klavins, already holds the conger record with a 2.17m, 36.2kg (80lb) specimen caught off Kristianstad in 2021. *blinker.de, 12 Oct 2023.*

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

I have written on numerous occasions about police witnesses who observed and reported something which certainly did not take place. Here are two further instances. In September 2022, a passer-by at Überlingen on Lake Constance alerted police that he had seen two yachts collide and several people in the water. The German Society for Shipwrecked Sailors, water police and firefighters swarmed out and searched the lake (which is half a mile wide at that point) for several hours; but they failed to trace any swimmers or damaged boats, and none were reported in the days following the alarm. *suedkurier.de, 6 Sept 2022.*

> *The captain had been living alone on his ship for 17 years*

Something similar took place on the afternoon of 7 January 2024 at Lake Como, Italy, when a witness called police to inform them of a surfer who had fallen from his board and appeared to be lost. Police and firefighters combed the lake, but came up empty handed. *laprovinciadicomo.it, 8 Jan 2024.*

WEREWOLF OF THE HARZ

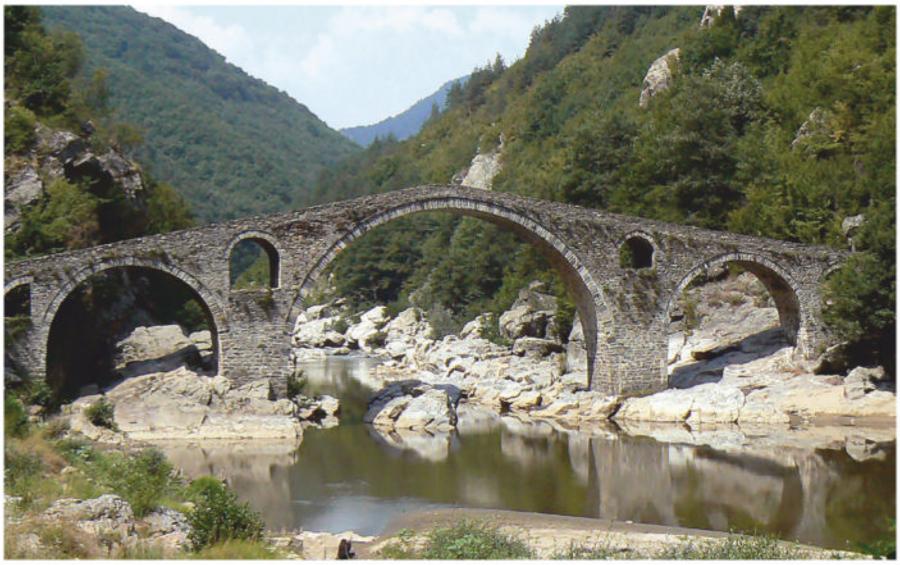
Last year (**FT432:25**) I reported on the wolf man of the Harz Mountains near Blankenburg, Germany, said to be some kind of wild man dressed in wolf skins and lurking in the countryside. In August 2023, a police investigation of the fire sites and makeshift huts that were attributed to the elusive wild man ended with the verdict that the 'werewolf' was, in fact, a survivalist and added that there had been no new encounters since March when the story featured in the German press. Then, that same month, *Bild*, Germany's biggest tabloid, carried a photo, supposedly of the wolfman, that had been taken by artist Tony and his girlfriend. It shows what appears to be a squatting, naked man with a spear or long stick in one hand. As far as can be told, none of the witnesses had attached any supernatural characteristics to the wolfman, and all agreed he was a normal human dressed in skins. *mdr.de, 31 Mar; nordbayern.de, 24 Aug 2023.*

STUPID CRIMINALS

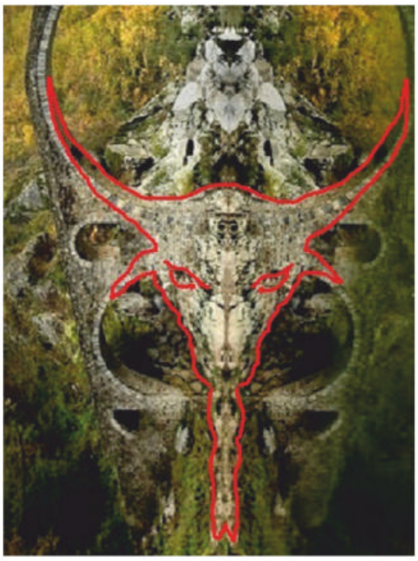
In December 2022, a burglar in Sankt Augustin near Bonn left the house he had broken into after half an hour, taking with him jewellery and cash; but he left behind his dentures and – along with the false teeth – his DNA. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 24 Dec 2022.*

In August 2022, a robber threatened a Mannheim cab driver with an "obvious toy pistol" asking him to hand over money, which the driver refused to do. The robber was arrested by passengers. *Rheinpfalz, 22 Aug 2022.*

But these inept criminals were surpassed by two robbers in Dresden in September 2023. On 1 January 2023 they



VASSIA ATANASSOVA / SPIRITIA / CREATIVE COMMONS



COURTESY UNEXPLAINED-EVENTS.COM/

ABOVE LEFT: This supposedly haunted bridge across Bulgaria's River Arda also has a stone that bears the Devil's footprint. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Another legend says that the bridge's builder agreed to hide an image of the Devil's face within the bridge, apparently visible when the bridge and its reflection are viewed from certain angles.

broke into a house where a surveillance camera had been installed. The camera filmed the whole crime, complete with all the conversation. They broke the lock with an axe, and then noticed the camera. "We better tear it off," says one of the burglars while the other asks him to pull over his hood. They don't manage to tear the apparatus off so they decide to blind it – without giving a thought to the fact that it has already recorded their faces and voices. They left the premises, but not before they had set fire to the house. The pair have not yet been caught, but police have their whole performance on video. *bild.de, 28 Sept 2023.*

EURO-SPOOKS

Stories about hauntings in Germany seldom reach the mainstream press, and when they do, they usually concern solved cases – like this one. When in November 2023, visitors and the members of the association that cares for Ballenstedt Castle, Saxony-Anhalt, heard strange knockings in the northern wing of the building, they at first thought they had a poltergeist. "We all thought that something mysterious was going on," said Detlef Heydecke of the Castle and Park Association, but further investigation revealed a grey-headed woodpecker who had taken residence in the walls and had caused the knocking sounds! *mz.de, 6 Nov 2023.*

Around Hallowe'en, popular magazines print lists of uncanny places. I take the following from one of them (*esquire.de, 18 Oct 2023*). A bridge across the River Arda in southern Bulgaria was erected between 1515 and 1518 by a builder named Dimitar who supposedly made a pact with the Devil. Legend has it that because the river's waters were so rough, it was impossible to build a bridge over it; but the Devil promised Dimitar he would reveal a method that would guarantee the structure would stand forever, but only if Dimitar agreed to include the Devil's face in the bridge. Should the builder fail, the Devil would own his soul. Dimitar succeeded in his task by cleverly incorporating the Devil's face in the bridge's reflection – and much to the Devil's frustration, he thereby escaped his hellish fate. It is also claimed that locals avoid the river crossing after dark as the wife of the builder still appears there: her shadow is trapped in the masonry. Yet another tale says that a footprint of the Devil can be found in one of the stones of the bridge.

SKY SIGNS

On the night of 22 January many people observed and filmed a meteor speed over the Berlin area of Germany. Soon, many people along the Havel river were searching for the space stone. "Both locals with their kids and amateur astronomers have searched the fields in small groups. But I am not aware of any finds yet," Thomas Becker of the Nature and Star Park Westhavelland told reporters. The meteorite or meteorites, he said, "could be in a very large area which could be several hundred square kilometres, tens of kilometres to the north and several kilometres in width." Experts from NASA and the Minor Planet Center of Cambridge, Massachusetts, calculated that Asteroid 2024BX1, with a diameter of several metres, had impacted near Nennhausen on 22 January at 1.32 am, some 50km (30 miles) from Berlin. As soon as this was known, a baker from Nennhausen came forward with a find; but it was quickly shown to be just a stone that had been painted black by its "discoverer". A few days later, magazines still reported on a frantic hunt for the cosmic stone, with whole families combing the undergrowth or flying their drones in search of the meteorite, which was claimed could be worth 100,000 Euros. A firefighter told the press he had examined "each and every strange-looking stone" in the region, while 41-year-old local Arian Huxdorf climbed hunters' raised hides with his kids to gain a better vantage point for spotting "burned holes in the snow." Others went around with metal detectors.

One week after the fall, a four-man team of Polish astronomers searched the calculated impact site and retrieved possible fragments of the cosmic visitor. "Of course, this is excellent news. We are currently working on the exact classification. Depending on the type of meteorite, there could be strong connections to our currently active space missions," said Jörn Helbert, head of the Department for Planetary Laboratories of the German Aerospace Centre. He was sure that additional pieces might be found now that the exact site was known.

Strangely enough, this is the second meteorite that crashed into Germany recently; the first was found in April 2023 at Elmshorn, north of Hamburg (**FT434:20, 440:18-19**). *rbb24.de, 22 Jan; focus.de, 24 Jan; fr.de, 29 Jan 2024.*

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

All the latest updates on astronomical own goals, mystery drones and apocalypse cows

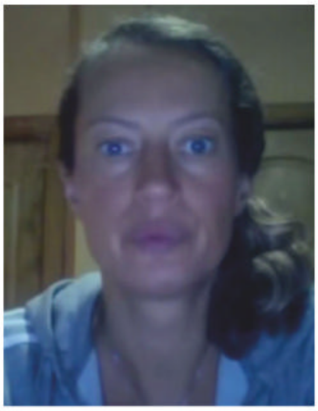
INTERSTELLAR METEOR [FT425:6]

Last year, Harvard Astronomer Avi Loeb led a controversial expedition to the waters off Papua New Guinea in search of what he believes to be a meteorite from outside the Solar System that could be the remains of technology from an alien civilisation. Even if it was not alien tech, it would still have been only the third interstellar visitor to the Solar System ever detected, and the only one to actually hit Earth, so was still worth investigating.

Loeb used a recording from a seismometer on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea to conclude that the meteor hit the Earth with a speed consistent with an interstellar object, and to deduce the location in the nearby ocean where its remains might be found. His team then collected debris from the seabed (without the permission of the Papua government) which led Loeb to conclude that the elements contained in the tiny metal spherules he found "may reflect an extraterrestrial technological origin". Other scientists have strongly rejected this conclusion and have instead presented evidence that suggests the spherules have a completely terrestrial origin and are a commonplace component of coal ash.

Now, a team from John Hopkins University has claimed that the seismic data Loeb used was not from a meteorite, but was "almost certainly" generated by a truck on a road adjacent to the seismometer. "The signal changed directions over time, exactly matching a road that runs past the seismometer," says planetary seismologist Benjamin Fernando. "It's really difficult to take a signal and confirm it is not from something. But what we can do is show that there are lots of signals like this, and show they have all the characteristics we'd expect from a truck and none of the characteristics we'd expect from a meteor." This not only means that the suggested extra-solar origin for the meteor is in doubt, but it also means that it didn't land anywhere near the area searched by Loeb's team. "The fireball location was actually very far away from where the oceanographic expedition went to retrieve these meteor fragments," said Fernando, who estimates the meteorite ended up over 160km (100 miles) from Loeb's search area. *iflscience.com, 8 Mar 2024.*

AVI LOEB



ABOVE: Avi Loeb and his team at work off the coast of Papua New Guinea in 2023. **LEFT:** Ella Draper, the woman at the centre of the Hampstead ritual abuse panic in 2015.

HAMPSTEAD WITCH HUNT [FT327:26-27, 361:24, 376:9]

While the early 1990s heyday of Satanic child abuse (SCA) hysteria is long behind us, it still occasionally rears its ugly head, with a case currently going through the courts in Glasgow showing many of its typical characteristics. Before that, in 2015, it was a case in Hampstead that was making headlines. Then, a yoga instructor named Ella Draper and her partner Abraham Christie attempted to win a custody battle with Draper's former partner by torturing and brainwashing the children into making florid accusations about an imaginary Satanic cult run by their father. This was supposed to involve drugged babies being routinely sent by courier services such as TNT and DHL to London from abroad to be sacrificed, blood being drunk from babies' skulls and shoes being made from their skin by the owner of a local shoe repair shop. Accusations made online swiftly expanded to include parents and teachers at the children's school and other local residents, including a clergyman, growing ever more lurid as they did so and becoming incorporated in the QAnon/ Pizzagate conspiracy ferment in the US.

Although police quickly exploded suggestions that any kind of ritual abuse was taking place, it did not stop the story becoming a conspirasphere staple, with crowdfunding being done to enable "investigators" to "kick down doors" and rescue children from their "abusive" parents. In March, a Channel 4 documentary, *Accused: The Hampstead Pædophile Hoax*, examined the story and heard directly from some of the parents affected, revealing how some of the perpetrators were tracked down and named, enabling them to be prosecuted and imprisoned. One mother, played by an actor voicing her words in the documentary, said, "These conspiracy theorists set up a website where they shared research about us. They made videos exposing the 'connections' between us. They connected dots that weren't really there. And these were intelligent people. They weren't stupid. They were highly educated people… they targeted groups who believed the government is corrupt, social services are corrupt, the Earth is flat. They planted the seeds and waited for it to go viral." She decided to infiltrate the conspiracy groups and try to identify the perpetrators. One was located "because we had an architecture expert in the group who could identify the south London clock tower behind him [in his videos]." This resulted in the man being jailed for nine months for harassment. "Other people, we identified through their voices," she says, and one was found by watching "hours and hours of mad videos about dolls until this woman opened a package with her name on it."

While Draper and Christie went on the run and have not been caught, Sabine McNeill, who acted as an unqualified "legal advisor" to the couple, was sentenced to nine years in prison for her part in orchestrating the plot. American blogger Rupert Wilson Quaintance, 38, was also jailed, for nine months, after travelling from his home in Charlottsville, Virginia, to harass people he believed were part of the imaginary pædophile ring. *D. Telegraph, 10 Mar 2024.*

RED HEIFERS [FT373:44-47, 425:49, 436:24, 440:7]

Four of the five red heifers imported from America to Israel are ready for their ritual slaughter. The fifth was disqualified when she developed a few white hairs. According to tradition only an unblemished red heifer may be sacrificed and burnt to ashes as part of the process to rededicate and rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. The ashes are biblically mandated for purification in a range of situations. Without the red heifer ashes, priests and Levites currently in training with the Temple Institute are disqualified from serving in a future rebuilt Temple. Furthermore, with all the bloodshed on the Temple Mount down through the centuries, the Mount itself must be cleansed before the Temple can be built. The slaughter is scheduled for a date in the spring of this year and while most secular Jews have little interest in the rebuilding of a temple, others see it as heralding the arrival of the Messiah.

Meanwhile, Hamas is watching the developments closely, according to the website Prophecy News Watch. A major part of their motivation for the October attacks, it is claimed, was seeing steps being taken towards rebuilding the Temple on the Temple Mount, which today is occupied by the al-Aqsa Mosque, the third most sacred site in Islam.

DRONE SWARMS [416:18-19]

Sensitive US installations continue to be buzzed by mysterious and elusive drone swarms, with the latest being Langley Air Force Base on Chesapeake Bay in southeastern Virginia. This is a particularly important area for the US military, being home to the large Norfolk and Newport News Naval Bases as well as Langley. Langley is one of the few air bases to fly F-22 stealth fighters, while Norfolk is home to around half the US aircraft carrier fleet. An Air Force spokesperson said, "The installation first observed UAS [uncrewed aerial systems] activities the evening of December 6 [2023] and experienced multiple incursions throughout the month of December. The number of UASs fluctuated and they ranged in size/configuration," adding that "None of the incursions appeared to exhibit hostile intent, but anything flying in our restricted airspace can pose a threat to flight safety."

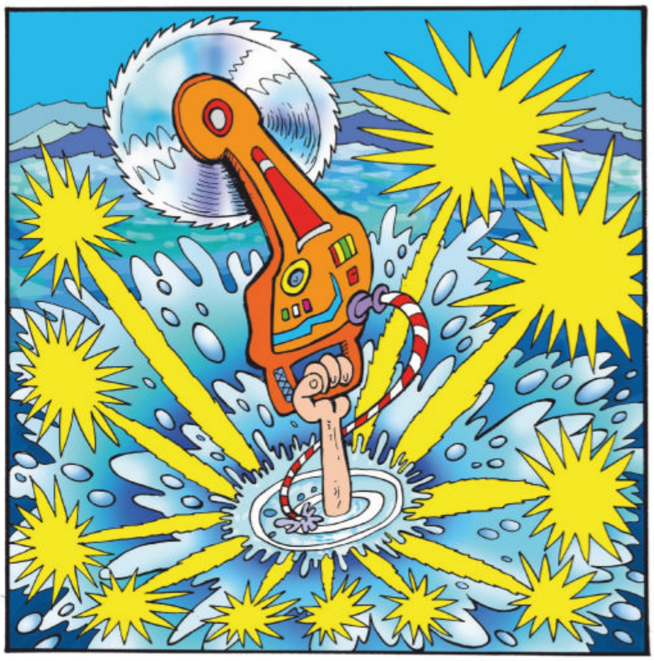
Despite the area having one of the most concentrated groupings of US defence assets anywhere, the Air Force completely failed to prevent the unknown drones operating with impunity from 6 December until at least 19 December. It seems that the Air Force response included repeated combat air patrols by F-16 fighters supported by aerial refuelling tankers and the use of one of NASA's advanced WB-57F aircraft, which flew regular circular missions over Langley during the period. NASA has three WB-57Fs, which are research aircraft equipped with arrays of advanced imaging equipment and sensors, and periodically loans them to the Air Force for specialised missions.

None of this seems to have had any impact on the drones, which remained both uncatchable and in action over Langley, with all attempts to locate their operators also apparently unsuccessful. The increased response to these incursions compared to earlier drone swarm events reflects the US military's growing concern about their inability to deal effectively with drones, even on their own soil. They find this particularly worrying in the light of how effective the technology has been in Ukraine, where drones are being increasingly used by both sides and have been shown capable of destroying large and expensive military hardware and infrastructure at very little cost (see **FT439:22**). *twz.com, 15 Mar 2024.*

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

279: SPARKING WATER



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

Water conducts electricity. (That's why you're not allowed to use a corded power saw in a municipal swimming pool.)

The "truth"

Forgive the pedantry, but water doesn't conduct electricity – i.e. allow electricity to pass through it easily. On the contrary, water is, in fact, a very effective insulator. All the same, everything we've been told about the dangers of mixing water and electric current is demonstrably true. The reason for this paradox is another quality of water: it's the most versatile solvent known to science, meaning it can dissolve a great variety of substances. Pure water is indeed an insulator, a barrier to electricity – but the only way you'll ever encounter the pure stuff is in a bottle of deionised or distilled water. In the quotidian realm, water always contains impurities, particles of the substances that have dissolved in it. That goes for tap water, rain, lakes, seas, snow, swimming pools, puddles, the lot. Pure water contains no ionised particles, without which electricity can't be conducted. So, water on its own is non-conductive. Impure water does contain ions, and is therefore conductive. Please leave your power saw in the changing facility.

Sources

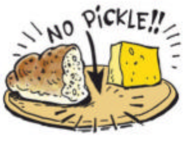
www.scienceabc.com/pure-sciences/do-you-think-that-water-conducts-electricity-if-you-do-then-youre-wrong.html; www.usgs.gov/special-topics/water-science-school/science/conductivity-electrical-conductance-and-water

Disclaimer

Not only don't I have a science O Level but even if I did, O Levels don't exist anymore, so whatever I might have learned would subsequently have been repealed. Corrections to the letters page, please.

Mythchaser update

In **FT212:17** we chased the story that British pub favourite the ploughman's lunch was invented by an advertising agency in the 1950s, and sought evidence of its earlier existence. The Winter 2021 issue of *Pub History* (the journal of the Pub History Society) reproduces a photographic postcard, c.1909, showing a beer-barrel table set with a pint of beer, a hunk of bread and a slab of cheese. But no visible pickle or chutney, so can this pub lunch be considered entirely authentic?



THE CONSPIRASPHERE

The Baltimore Key Bridge disaster is a black swan event offering an embarrassment of potential theories and villains. **NOEL ROONEY** finds himself suffering from conspiratorial overload…

A BRIDGE TOO FAR?

The Key Bridge: a name resonant with a plethora of curious associations. It really is (was) a key bridge; not so much for commercial shipping (although the port of Baltimore is the second largest in that respect) as for the military support vessels that are now trapped upstream of the tangled wreckage. And Francis Scott Key, for whom the bridge was named, was, of course the person who wrote 'The Star Spangled Banner'.

Perhaps that helps to make the tragic events of 26 March more surreal; that, and the name of the ship that crashed into the bridge supports being *Dali*. However you slice it, the whole affair is the darkest of black swan events (the phrase has been used by a number of commentators, mainstream and otherwise). And the omens have not gone unnoticed in the C-sphere.

The ship lost all power, twice, between being released by the tugs and crashing into the bridge. It managed to get a Mayday signal out, three minutes before the collision; enough time, mercifully (or suspiciously for some commentators), for the emergency services to clear the bridge of traffic. Then it appeared to make a 30 degree course correction, which took it directly onto one of the main support pylons.

Now the *Dali* sits, disabled, on the ruins of the bridge and, more ominously still, athwart a high-pressure gas pipeline. The salvage operation cannot get underway until the bodies of those who perished are recovered, and the exact status of the pipeline is assessed. It's a mess, clearly; but is it more?

US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, BALTIMORE DISTRICT

Within minutes of the collision, voices were raised claiming an attack on US infrastructure by powers unknown; which is another way of saying that conspiracist Democrats have blamed the Russians and their Republicans counterparts the Chinese. This is, according to some, the opening salvo of the Third World War (if one doesn't count Gaza, Ukraine, Somalia and various other theatres across the globe). At the very least it's sabotage, since in the US these days, accidents don't just happen.

It was all too convenient. The warning, from a ship otherwise disabled; the police presence on the bridge, ready to clear traffic; the change of course, to set the *Dali* directly on target; the choice of the gas pipeline as the locus of the crime. In the C-sphere, such details don't stack up on the side of the angels. And if you have followed the ongoing saga of food processing plants going up in flames, and train wrecks spilling hazardous materials, you will know that the bridge disaster is part of the obvious plan to destroy America from within.

> *It managed to get a Mayday signal out before the collision*

In fact, there are so many reasons for assuming the worst of the catastrophe that it is beginning to suffer from a phenomenon I have come to think of as conspiratorial overload: a situation with so many anomalies and loose ends that conspiracists are swamped with potential theories and villains. This phenomenon is not new. Consider the assassination of JFK. If you belong to the camp that does not accept the lone nut killer version of events (which puts you in the majority, in the US at least) then you have a theoretical problem stemming from a surfeit of evidential riches. The difficulty is not working out who else was in Dealey Plaza that fateful day; it's working out who wasn't.

At the other end of the scale you get incidents where the relevant conspiracy theory is served up, garnished and seasoned, right from the off. The terrible events in the Crocus concert hall in Moscow, on 22 March, are a tragic case in point. Before the incident had finished, the media already knew that IS was responsible, not least because IS had already claimed responsibility.

But doubts began to surface almost as quickly. The terrorists, rather than stay on the scene and accept martyrdom (considered by most security experts to be an integral part of the Jihadi job description), set off in a car that was intercepted on a road that only went to one place. Ukraine is not usually listed as an IS stronghold. And these Jihadis, it transpired, were being paid: not in virgins (or raisins if you prefer) but in dollars. They were apparently on their way to collect when they were apprehended.

More strangeness turned up in the following days. The attackers had made the standard video reciting the Shahada and their willingness to die (though not immediately, it appears). Except there were the fingers – the wrong fingers. Jihadi videos follow trends, and for some years now the trend has been to raise one's right hand, index finger extended, when reciting the words. In the video of the Crocus attackers, they all raised their left hands. This is, by all accounts, tantamount to blasphemy.

I think the iconography of that gesture would keep a professor or two busy for some while. The question that occurred to me was: who was it for? Who would see such a flagrantly blasphemous, or just egregiously wrong, gesture and be pleased by it? It is hard to imagine any sect of Islam being amused by it. That doesn't mean, of course, that the Russian accusations against Ukraine and the US are correct; but it surely suggests that the fast-food delivery of blame – something some observers have been noting since 9/11 – was in this case at least rather less accurate than advertised.

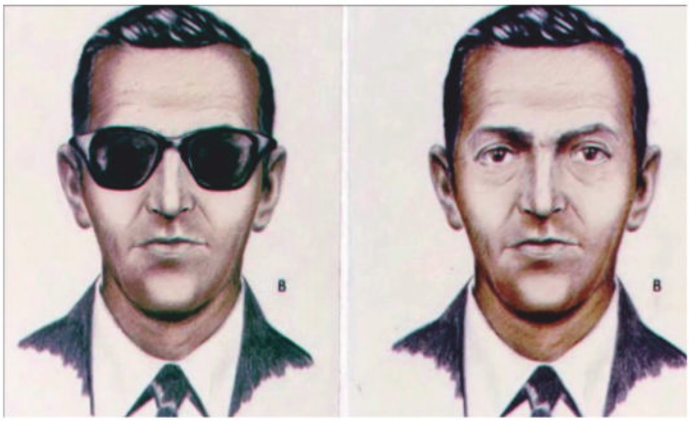
So that is the choice for the budding conspiracist: either so many suspects that you don't know who to choose; or a quick resolution that is, to paraphrase H L Mencken, popular, simple and dead wrong. In a detail economy, certainty is a scarce commodity.

https://allnewspipeline.com/This_Sabotage_Was_Clearly_An_Act_Of_War.php

https://thepeoplesvoice.tv/5-hidden-facts-that-prove-baltimore-bridge-collapse-was-an-inside-job/

DB COOPER FOUND?

According to his son, Richard Floyd McCoy Jnr was the man behind the legendary heist. Will he finally 'get the credit'?



ABOVE: Two of the iconic sketches of 'Dan Cooper' circulated by the FBI. **BELOW:** A headline from the *The Daily Herald*, Provo, Utah, 10 April 1972, detailing the capture of the 1972 hijacking suspect, Richard Floyd McCoy. **BOTTOM OF PAGE:** Richard Floyd McCoy Jr has been identified by his son as the real 'DB Cooper'.

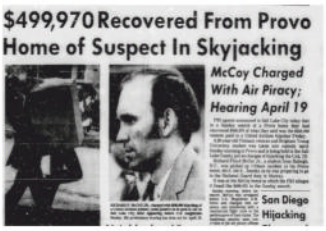
On 24 November 1971, a man boarded Northwest Orient Flight 305 from Portland to Seattle, carrying what he later told flight attendants was a suitcase bomb. Once airborne, he threatened to detonate it if they did not follow his instructions. He allowed the plane to continue to Seattle, where he freed the passengers in exchange for $200,000 (£163,000) – equivalent to about $1.5m in 2024 – and two parachutes. He then had the plane take off for Mexico City, but over southwest Washington State he donned the parachutes and jumped from the rear door of the aircraft into the night, never to be seen again, although the remains of some of the money were found buried on the banks of the Columbia River in 1980. The hijacker had bought a ticket under the name "Dan Cooper", but a reporter later confused his name with another suspect and called him "DB Cooper" and that name stuck. After years of searching and getting nowhere, the FBI closed the case in 2016, concluding that the man had died that night, his body lost somewhere in Washington's dark and impenetrable forests. Not everyone agreed, and dedicated amateur DB Cooper sleuths have continued to investigate in the hope of identifying the man behind the mystery, whether he survived or not.

Over the years, six potential "DB Coopers" have been identified with varying degrees of credibility. The latest was in 2022, when Erik Ulis, a true-crime investigator, used an FBI report analysing residues on a tie Cooper left on the plane to identify metallurgist Vince Petersen as "DB Cooper", although Petersen's son was doubtful as he had no parachuting experience. Now, a seventh DB Cooper suspect has been fingered for the crime, this time by his own son, Richard "Rick" McCoy III, who says he firmly believes his father Richard Floyd McCoy Jr was Cooper. McCoy cites an alleged confession from his late mother, Karen McCoy, who, he said, claimed to have acted as an accomplice, helping his father to commit the daring crime. This claim has the benefit that not only does the older McCoy physically resemble the photofit of Cooper made after his hijack, but he was also a highly experienced skydiver and was later convicted of a hijacking with similarities to Cooper's. This took place on 7 April 1972, a few months after the Cooper hijack. Then, the older McCoy hijacked United Airlines Flight 855, shortly after take-off from Denver, Colorado, using a gun and a grenade to enforce his demands. He, too, freed his passengers, then demanded $500k and, once airborne again, jumped from the plane over Utah using his own parachute.

Unlike Cooper, McCoy was caught after 72 hours and sentenced to 45 years in prison for his crime. He escaped, after serving two years, using a fake handgun made out of dental paste and was killed in a shootout with police in Virginia in 1974. Rick says that he always knew his mother had helped his father plan both heists, and drove him to the airport to carry them out, but had kept this secret while his mother was still alive. He says that his father struggled to find work after serving in Vietnam, and the hijackings were a way to get money and to strike back at an Establishment that was denying him employment.

Rick's mother allegedly told him that, while he successfully got away with the DB Cooper hijacking, his father made mistakes that led to him losing most of the $200,000 ransom.

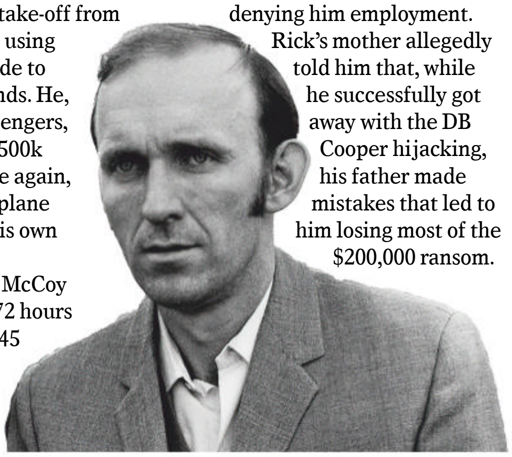
He was convicted of a hijacking with similarities to Cooper's



$499,970 Recovered From Provo Home of Suspect In Skyjacking

McCoy Charged With Air Piracy; Hearing April 19

San Diego Hijacking



He used an improved methodology to carry out the 1972 hijacking, including bringing his own parachute instead of relying on the authorities to supply one. This time though, he was swiftly apprehended and most of the money was found in his house, still wrapped in rubber bands.

Although his sentence would have been even more severe if he had been connected to the Cooper hijack, McCoy claims his mother used to say: "Your dad would be upset that he didn't get the credit [for DB Cooper]. The credit that he deserved." Rick McCoy has also discovered a parachute on his grandmother's property that he believes could have come from the Cooper hijack and has agreed to hand it over to the FBI for further investigation. In addition, he has discovered his father's jump logbook showing a pattern of practices that line up perfectly with the two crimes, and has also given this to the FBI. His father's credit card receipts show a pattern of activity that could also implicate him in the Cooper hijack, including the potential laundering of the proceeds that he managed to retain through Las Vegas.

The Bureau has long suspected that Richard Floyd McCoy Jr might have been Cooper, but has never been able to prove it. They have repeatedly asked the family for DNA swabs to help them make the connection, but while Karen McCoy was alive, the McCoys always refused. Now, Rick says he will provide a cheek swab so that his father can finally get the credit for the DB Cooper hijack his mother always thought he deserved. Ulis called the McCoy development intriguing and believes that the FBI has taken a new interest in the case because of his findings, but thinks there is a "zero-percent chance" that McCoy is Cooper. *the-sun.com, 19 Feb; popularmechanics.com, 28 Feb 2024.*

For more on the DB Cooper mystery, see Brian J Robb, "Flight into Infamy", **FT412:30-37**, and **FT139:18, 347:20-21**.

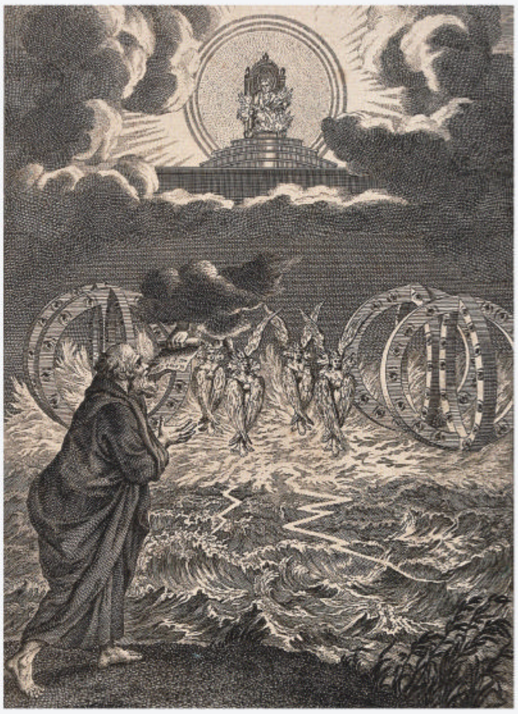
Beyond the nuts and bolts

NIGEL WATSON revisits the spiritual and religious aspects of UFO encounters from Ezekial to Bill Bean

PAUL BENNETT'S ENCOUNTERS

I have just been revising, revamping and tarting-up my 1990 book *Portraits of Alien Encounters*, which features my investigation of high strangeness encounters and experiences in northern England in the 1970s and early 1980s. A large part of the book covers the many UFO sightings and paranormal experiences of teenager Paul Bennett, so it was one of those fortean "coincidences" when I read Andy Owens's letter about Paul's book *The Old Stones of Elmet* (**FT443:63**). Andy is puzzled that in a book about the history of West Yorkshire standing stones, Paul writes about seeing dancing figures and strange lights at Blackstone Circle.

Paul was the first editor of *UFO Brigantia* and went on to produce the Earth Mysteries magazine *Earth*, and now runs *The Northern Antiquarian* website. In the "about section" he describes how he has been interested in "archæology, folklore, history and mythic ideas underscoring megaliths and their compatriots for more than 40 years. It's something of an obsession that's been with me since I started venturing onto Ilkley Moor as a 10-year-old." Surprisingly, he does not mention his multiple alien and UFO encounters. Perhaps he now regards them as no longer as significant or relevant to his current interests; however, those early UFO influences do explain why he introduces a weird encounter with those lights and whirling figures in his Elmet book. He cannot help channelling his inner "John Keel". I should shamelessly add that my *Portraits of Alien Encounters Revisited* should be out next year.



SPIRITUAL SAUCERS...

My *Portraits* book covered some very unusual cases that many ufologists at the time dismissed as not irrelevant to the subject, as they did not involve sightings of tangible nuts-and-bolts spacecraft. When I spoke to Charles Bowen, the late, great editor of *Flying Saucer Review*, at a UFO conference, he simply dismissed Paul Bennett's experiences as figments of the imagination. I felt that attitude was rather closed-minded and it became my project to investigate these "damned" cases and to detail the profound effect the belief in UFOs and aliens had on the thoughts, feelings and lives of UFO percipients (or experiencers as we would call them today).

Scrolling forwards from my ancient 1970s cases, I note that DW Pasulka, professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina, has written *Encounters: Experiences with Nonhuman intelligences* (St Martin's Essentials, 2023). It shows, like my book, the sheer complexity of UFO experiences that have a strong spiritual and religious aspect to them. Pasulka interviews people who not only see UFOs but also experience altered realities, encounter angels and demons and are often touched by uncanny coincidences and dreams. She is very much guided by the thoughts of Jacques Vallee and other more secretive ufologists in the USA, that these UFO experiences are interactions with non-human intelligences who live beyond time and space. This blend of techno/mysticism allows for UAPs to be physical objects that can mess with our minds and explains why they remain one-step ahead of our technology and understanding.

...AND SATANIC SAUCERS

Just to underline the religious aspect of alien encounters, 57-year-old Reverend Bill Bean, who is described as a non-denominational deliverance minister and exorcist, says that he has had all manner of supernatural and UFO experiences. Like many others, his experiences started when he was young. He said: "I suffered physical demonic attacks between ages five and 12. My mother was attacked even more severely, she suffered more than any other person I've seen in my life."

He claims that after Satan and a third of the angels were expelled from Heaven, divine Merkabah Chariots transported them to our unsuspecting planet. Not resting on their laurels, according to Reverend Bean, "They came down here and they took human women and produced a hybrid offspring of giants called the Nephilim." Not content with the charms of human women, the Nephilim had intercourse with apes, bears, wolves, dogs and monkeys, resulting in the creation of Bigfoot and Sasquatch. Yet, like UAPs, "They are every bit as much a supernatural being as they are flesh and blood."

This sounds like stuff out of the Zecharia Sitchin (1920-2010) playbook. He theorised that there was a 12th planet in our Solar System called Nibiru. It was populated by technologically advanced, humanoid extraterrestrials, who visited Earth 450,000 years ago to mine for gold. As they needed slave workers, genetic engineering was used to create *Homo sapiens* by mixing extraterrestrial genes with those of *Homo erectus*. The Bible, in Genesis, named the visitors from Nibiru the Nephilim (see **FT138:47, 173:40-41, 271:24 404:44-47**).

I must confess I had to Google what a Merkabah Chariot is, and it is our old friend Ezekiel's four-wheeled chariot driven by four living creatures that he saw in a vision. NASA scientist Josef F Blumrich was so convinced that Ezekiel's vision was of a real spaceship that he wrote *The Spaceships of Ezekiel* (1974). *www.dailystar.co.uk/news/weird-news/bigfoot-sasquach-alien-human-bear-32338348*

HYBRID CHILDREN

Eleven years ago Julius Shields, now aged 28, says he saw orbs outside his home in Missouri, followed by a small creature. He said: "It had three tentacles and it raised them up and started tapping on my window. That was the first time I'd ever seen something that wasn't human."

After that night he began having dreams of life on other planets, and being in a gladiatorial arena. Then he said it escalated to a point where, "I was having sex with different creatures, women and just different stuff. I would wake up, and I would look at my pants and sometimes there'd be nothing and sometimes it would just be wet – there would be no actual sperm in there." He now wonders if they used his sperm to create hybrid children. Perhaps his visitors were Nephilim; if so, I hope his offspring aren't hairy Bigfoot types.*www.dailymail.co.uk/ femail/article-13187539/alien-abduction-took-sperm-sexual-experiment.html*

Reality blinks again

JENNY RANDLES returns to the subject of those ‘glitches in the Matrix’ when reality seems to shift

Ten years ago in my monthly column here I first wrote about something odd that I had noticed in a number of cases (**FT315:27**). I came to call these fleeting unusual events ‘reality blinks’. But I never took the idea much further.

Now, to my surprise, I have come across someone else who has noticed the same phenomenon. Using the same term, that reality “blinked”, a Reddit poster described how “whilst sober” a “weird” thing occurred. This happened while he was cutting carrots and listening to an audiobook. The sound of the reading just faded away, and then back in as ‘reality’ returned round him. He said it felt like a blink in his senses, just as I had described. In response, at least a dozen people added their own accounts, in which reality similarly switched, from their perspective – seeing objects move or appear and then disappear. The consistent theme was that in a sudden if subtle way, their local reality permanently changed.

Some famous people have also reported this oddity – Somerset Maughan described how the orientation of a figure in a painting he was viewing changed as he looked at it, and afterwards it stayed ‘stuck’ in that new alignment. He and others had the sense that they had switched suddenly from one version of the Universe to a largely identical localised one, where tiny things had altered for some reason. So whether psychological or physical, it does appear to be a genuine if rare phenomenon. But can it be related to the paranormal, or indeed to UFOs in particular?

In my own case, I had seen a dark mark appear out of nowhere on a wall. Oddly, so did my cat, which was sitting on my knee. We both turned just as it ‘blinked’ into place. I thought at first it must be a fly or spider that had landed. But it was just a mark that ‘must’ have always been there. Yet we both seemingly noticed it ‘arrive’ at that moment – as if we were seeing it for the first time. Or it had just magically appeared within our reality. A glitch in the Matrix, as it were.

If this was a real effect, I could see all kinds of implications, not just for UFO encounters, but for various other anomalous phenomena. Was it a little-reported effect of consciousness – or of the nature of reality?

The question outstanding was whether this was actually a change within the world itself being perceived accidentally as it happened, or some kind of odd perception, maybe related to the Oz Factor – that unusual level of consciousness that witnesses to close encounters seem to enter.

LEFT: If the author’s cat is anything to go by, then our feline friends may also be having some strange experiences.

The baffling experience lasted unknown moments as time became immeasurable

In that state, sounds seem to fade, the mind focuses internally and it acts as a precursor to an extraordinary experience such as a UFO close encounter. ‘Reality blinks’ may be another facet of that same process. The link with my cat implies that animals as well as humans might experience the same thing and so be able to share, for example, UFO episodes. Plenty of cases do seem to support the idea. That has implications for arguing whether these events are really occurring.

Many years ago I heard from a man called Roy, from Essex. On 10 November 1971 he was walking to work in Colchester when he saw ahead a milky white, fuzzy, egg-shaped ball of light. It changed colours in a sequence, and suddenly Roy noticed that all sounds had disappeared around him, as if he were in a vacuum. Nothing around him in this busy part of town was moving, no people, no noises. The Oz Factor has always included this kind of shift, but I had presumed it was a psychological one caused by the mind focusing on the strange experience. In Roy’s reality blink it coincided with the arrival of a UFO.

This baffling experience lasted unknown moments as time became immeasurable. Then: “I turned the corner, and it was like opening a door and entering a party.” The silence, the lack of sensations all ended, and reality instantly returned – in a blink.

But was it the world he had left, or a new, slightly shifted one? I could not decide which of three options made the most sense here.

Was Roy’s feeling of timelessness and newly imposed reality the result of a temporarily altered state of a consciousness, or even a kind of blackout like a seizure? Or was the strange light generating energy that distorted his perception in some way? Or perhaps there was a literal blink in reality as he moved in and out of the sphere of influence of this odd experience caused by the glowing egg? Even a shift in dimensional space?

Roy had other experiences like this over time, suggesting they were somehow linked to his own perception of the world. One of them was his first, as a teenager. He was in an alleyway in Colchester one winter evening when he sensed someone coming from behind to pass him. He stepped to one side, but saw just a small floating light. Moments later, he blacked out and found himself inexplicably at the end of the alley, all alone and yet soaking wet. “Like I had stepped in the bath with all my clothes on,” as he later described it. It was intriguing that the UFO was the least interesting thing here.

I keep coming across ‘haunted people’ like this whose story feels much deeper than a routine account of fleeting lights in the sky. It implies the possibility of a much richer human component to what is going on. The kind of thing we are dealing with in these edge cases may be the key to close encounter experiences and particularly the alien abduction phenomenon.

Consider how an ancient Roman might see an aircraft, not as what it was – a human-built device – but as something easily fitting into their level of understanding about the Universe – a god, a demon, or dragon. We need to have a broader sense of the unusualness associated with the things we now see, and not infer that UFO cases are just what we have assumed they were for almost a century. My hunch is they could be much stranger than alien visitors and perhaps are a pointer toward rather more interesting things about the Universe than beings from Alpha Centauri who learned to traverse space. Perhaps reality blinks are a clue to profound things that could unlock doors to science well beyond ‘flying saucers’.

THE GOAT GLAND DOCTOR

A century ago, a fake doctor pioneered 'goat gland' transplants as a miracle cure-all, using the emerging mass medium of radio and populist politics to make his fortune. **BRIAN J ROBB** examines the rise and fall of Dr John R Brinkley, the infamous Texan goat gland doctor.

To some he was a miraculous healer, to others a quack and a charlatan. He was an accidental pioneer in the early days of American radio broadcasting, but to most he's remembered as the notorious 'goat glands' doctor. Dr John Romulus Brinkley was all these things and more, and his story throws light on the concept of xenotransplantation – the mixing of living cells, organs, or tissues between species – and how a conman can cash in on new – sometimes real, sometimes fake – medical developments to his own great advantage. Brinkley was a master of persuasion, in that he was able to make the population at large believe in his near-magic cure-all, using the power of developing mass media to reach a bigger audience than any tent show or medicine caravan could ever have hoped to. When his status was challenged, he turned to politics to try and save his reputation. Brinkley's 'goat gland' transplants called upon the vigorous and lusty power of the Greek god Pan, the half-man, half-goat figure associated with sexual potency – the very thing Brinkley's patients came to see him about.

TALKING BOLLOCKS

Brinkley was born illegitimate in 1885, the result of a liaison between his father, John Brinkley Sr., who'd been a self-taught medic for the Confederate States Army, and his wife Sarah's 24-year-old niece. Brinkley was poorly educated, raised on medical texts and Bible stories, and married schoolfriend Sally Wike in January 1907. In an indication of things to come, the newly-weds toured rural towns posing as Quaker doctors selling 'patent' cure-alls. Brinkley learned the medicine caravan trade as apprentice to a Dr Burke who specialised in 'virility' tonics for 'male problems'.

To bolster his credentials, Brinkley enrolled in an unaccredited medical college focused on herbal remedies (or 'eclectic medicine', as it was known). Settled in Chicago, Brinkley had three daughters with Sally, but theirs was a tempestuous union. While continuing his medical studies, Brinkley discovered a topic that fascinated him: glandular extracts and their effects on humans. Here was a career opportunity the ambitious conman could get behind.

Brinkley then bought a fake medical qualification from a 'diploma mill' based in Kansas. When Brinkley's wife finally left him with their daughters in 1931, he relocated once again to Greenville, South Carolina. With his newly acquired 'credentials', he teamed up with another dodgy practitioner, the one-armed Dr Crawford, as the Greenville Electro-Medic Doctors. Their adverts targeted those concerned about their 'manly vigour'. Patients were given a $25 ($700 today) 'miracle shot' – just coloured water – to treat their impotence, having been told this was the latest 'electric medicine' from Germany. Unpaid debts saw the two 'doctors' flee after just two months.

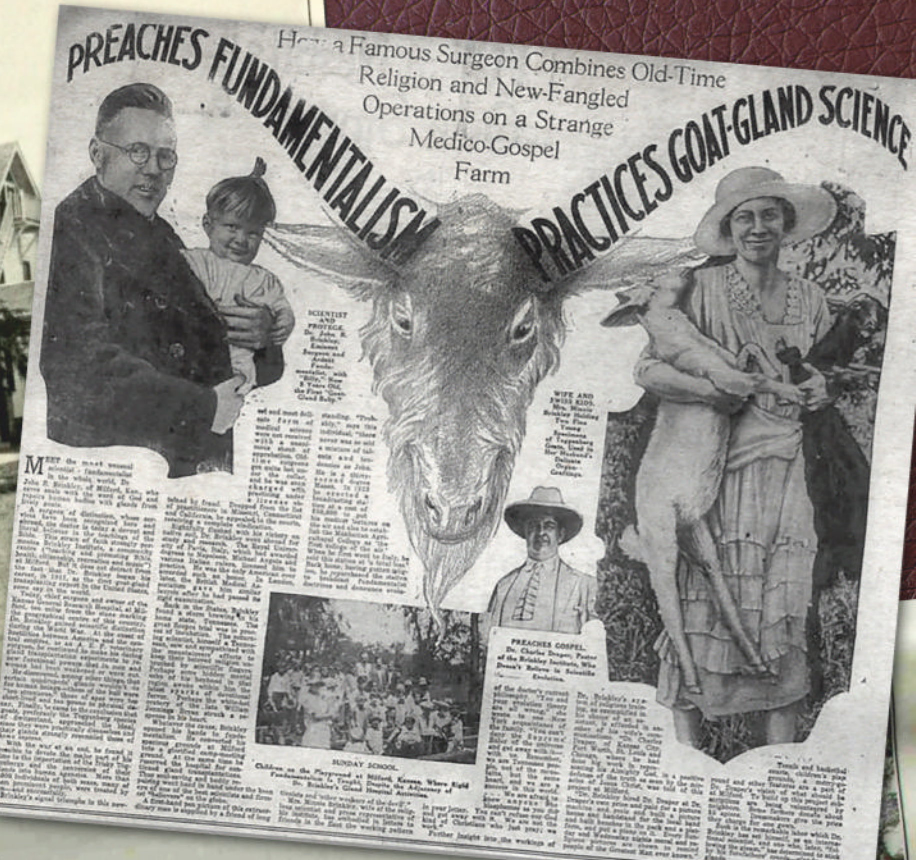
A CONMAN CAN CASH IN ON NEW MEDICAL DEVELOPMENTS TO HIS OWN ADVANTAGE

In 1913, Brinkley married second wife Minerva 'Minnie' Jones, the daughter of a doctor, while still married to Sally. After a brief honeymoon, Brinkley was jailed for practising medicine without a licence and for writing bad cheques. He laid the blame on his erstwhile partner Dr Crawford. The pair of mendacious 'doctors' settled their debts, with Crawford paying most of the bills while Brinkley contributed $200 (from his father-in-law), which got him out of jail and back on the road.

Brinkley then took over the medical practice of a retiring doctor in Judsonia, Arkansas. By the start of the First World War, Brinkley was studying again at Kansas City's Eclectic Medical University, graduating in May 1915 with a $100 diploma that allowed him to practise medicine in eight states. He worked as a company doctor at a slaughterhouse, where he discovered the randy nature of goats, and finally divorced his first wife, at Minerva's insistence. As an Army Reservist, Brinkley was called up in 1917, but evaded action by feigning a nervous breakdown. He was discharged after just two months, moving to Milford, Kansas, where the tiny town needed a doctor.

At the end of the war, John Brinkley was well-established in Milford as a much-appreciated local doctor who employed many locals on decent wages. During the post-war flu pandemic he made house-calls, helping further embed him in the community. When Milford farmer Bill Stittsworth asked Brinkley if there was a treatment for men who were 'sexually weak', the charlatan doctor recalled his studies of glandular extracts and the randy goats at the slaughterhouse, and said his patient would have no worries if he had "a pair of those buck glands in you". When his desperate patient begged him to carry out the operation, Brinkley recognised a new opportunity (the farmer's family claimed Brinkley paid him to take part). For $750 a throw ($10,000 today), Brinkley began to offer 'goat gland' transplants to men suffering from impotence.

THE BRINKLEY HOS



PREACHES FUNDAMENTALISM PRACTICES GOAT-GLAND SCIENCE

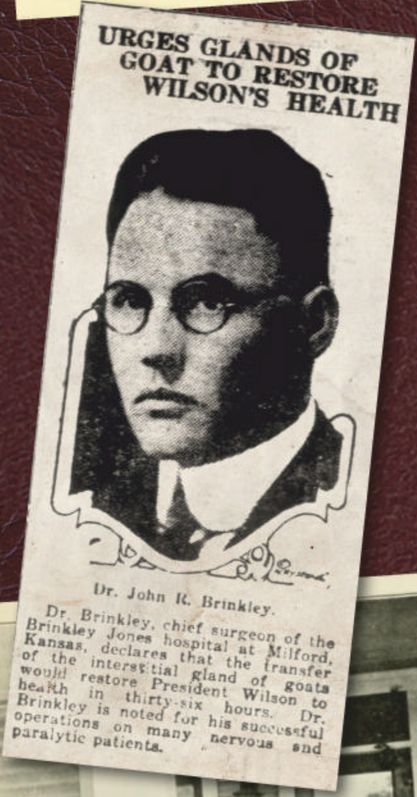
How a Famous Surgeon Combines Old-Time Religion and New-Fangled Operations on a Strange Medico-Gospel Farm

SCIENTIST AND PROTEGE. Dr. John R. Brinkley, Eminent Surgeon and Ardent Fundamentalist, with "Billy," Now 2 Years Old, the First "Goat-Gland Baby."

WIFE AND TWIN KIDS. Mrs. Minnie Brinkley Holding Two Fine Young Specimens of Toggenburg Goats, Used in Her Husband's Delicate Organ-Graftings.

PREACHES GOSPEL. Dr. Charles Draper, Pastor of the Brinkley Institute, Who Doesn't Believe in Scientific Evolution.

SUNDAY SCHOOL. Children on the Playground at Milford, Kansas, Where Rigid Fundamentalism is Taught, Despite the Adjacency of Dr. Brinkley's Gland Hospital Activities.



URGES GLANDS OF GOAT TO RESTORE WILSON'S HEALTH

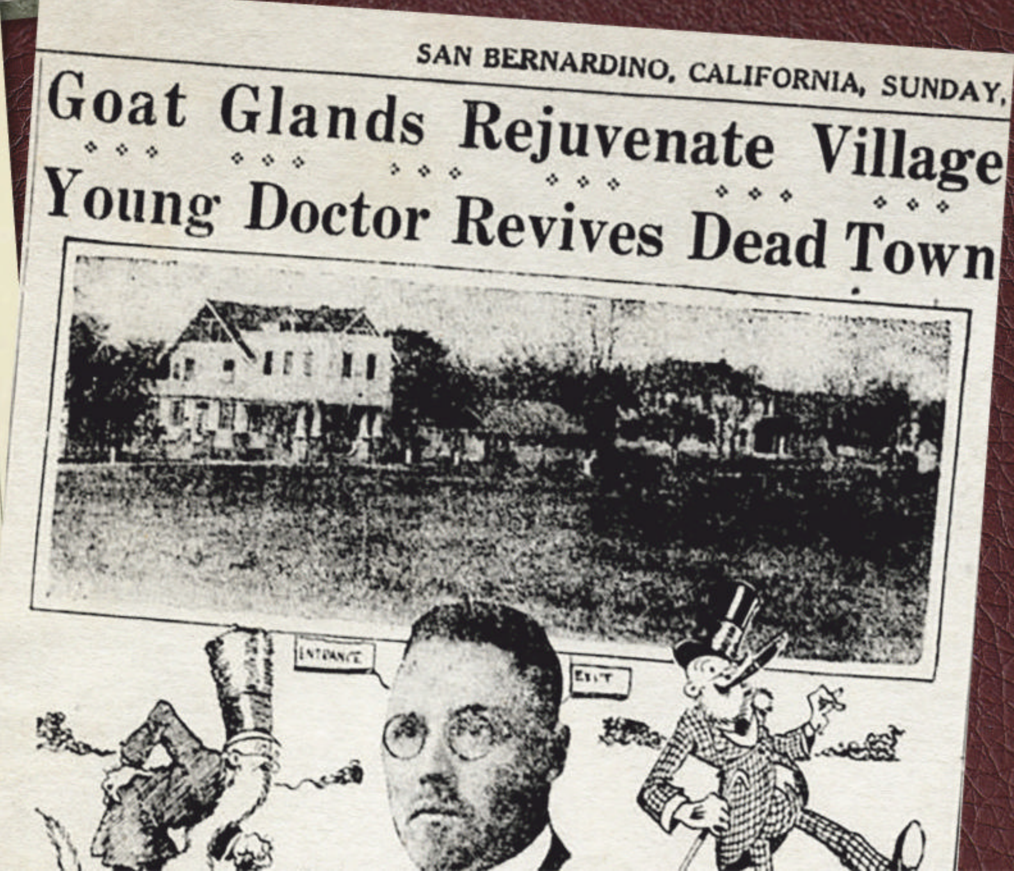
Dr. John R. Brinkley.

Dr. Brinkley, chief surgeon of the Brinkley Jones hospital at Milford, Kansas, declares that the transfer of the interstitial gland of goats would restore President Wilson to health in thirty-six hours. Dr. Brinkley is noted for his successful operations on many nervous and paralytic patients.

The BRINKLEY-JONES
BROADCASTING STATION

Pennell 1921

DR. AND MRS. BRINKLEY

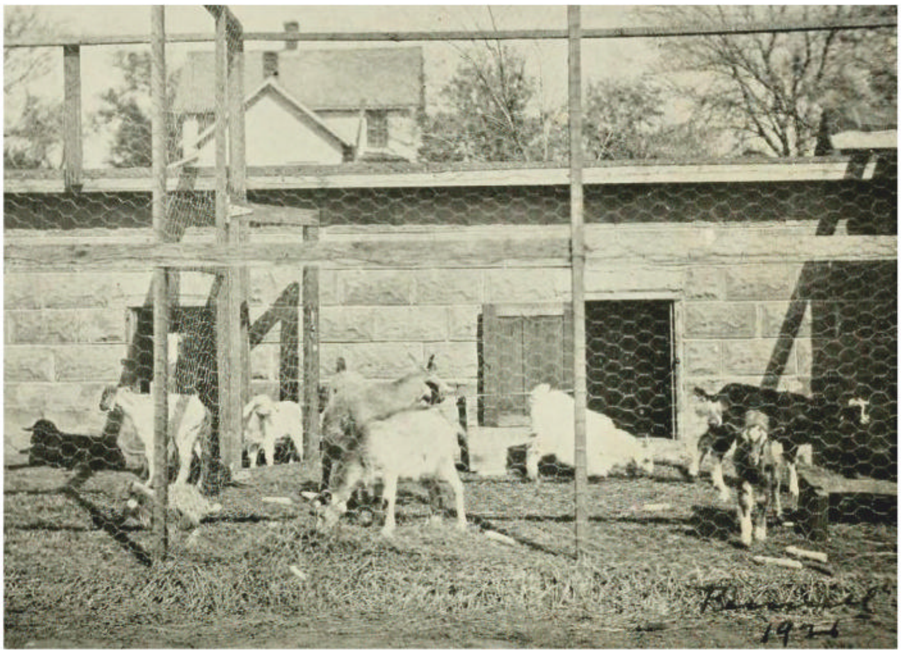


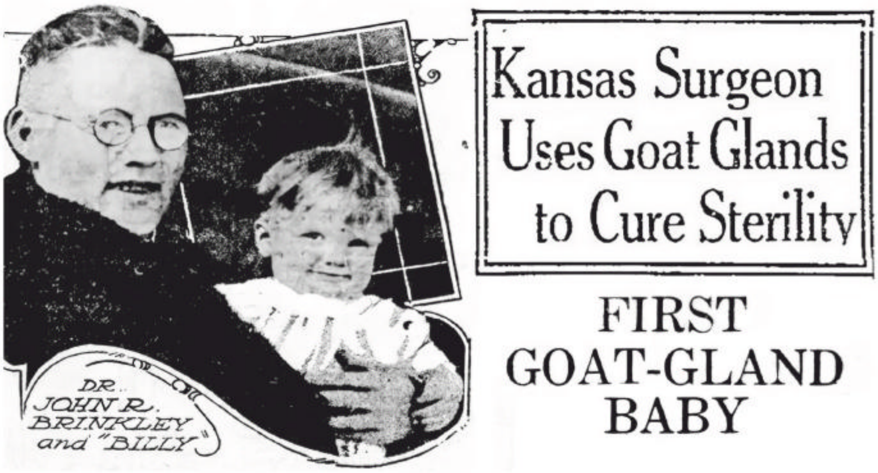
SAN BERNARDINO, CALIFORNIA, SUNDAY,

Goat Glands Rejuvenate Village

Young Doctor Revives Dead Town

ENTRANCE
EXIT





DR. JOHN R. BRINKLEY and "BILLY"

Kansas Surgeon Uses Goat Glands to Cure Sterility

FIRST GOAT-GLAND BABY

ABOVE LEFT: Unsuspecting Toggenburg goats kept outside Brinkley's Milford clinic. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A portrait from the 1920s. **LEFT:** Billy, born in 1920, was advertised as the "first goat-gland baby".

Brinkley kept goats outside his clinic and allowed patients to select their favourite – Toggenburg goats were a favoured breed. From a six-week-old goat, brought into the operating room, Brinkley removed the testicles (each about the size of a macadamia nut) which were then sewn into the human patient's scrotum. They were not connected to any blood vessels, so proved entirely ineffective and this 'foreign' matter was eventually simply absorbed by the body. Brinkley operated in a less-than-sterile environment and often did so while under the influence of alcohol. This, combined with his lack of formal medical education, made his 'goat gland' transplants rather hit-and-miss. Post-operation infections were rife, and a number of his patients died: between 1930 and 1941 Brinkley would ultimately face over two dozen wrongful death legal actions.

Early on, though, Brinkley enjoyed some success. The first 'goat-gland baby' (named Billy, naturally) was born in 1920, a banner year for the now 35-year-old Brinkley. He ran newspaper ads promoting his transplants as a cure-all for up to 27 ailments, including dementia, emphysema, and, er, flatulence... A firm believer in publicity, Brinkley began direct mail campaigns, hiring an ad agent to send out thousands of booklets to men, promising he could turn "lambs into rams".

Brinkley was not alone in experimenting with transplanting animal organs into humans; in fact, it was something of a fad in the early-20th century. Russian-born French surgeon Serge Voronoff was known in the 1920s for his efforts to transplant monkey testicles to men (see **FT319:14**). Voronoff demonstrated his technique at a symposium in Chicago which the curious Brinkley attended, only to be banned from entry. Brinkley kicked up such a fuss that his experience made it into the newspapers; all good publicity. He quickly set up shop in Chicago and offered his 'miracle process' to city society. Amazingly, Brinkley attracted a judge, lawmakers, and the Chancellor of Chicago Law School as eager patients. Back in Milford, demand for his services grew now that their local miracle worker was a name in the 'big city'. Unknown to them, their folk hero doctor's appeal was built on lies and fraud, yet his medically useless procedure saw Brinkley well on the way to becoming a millionaire.

MODERN MEDIA MONSTER

Los Angeles Times owner Henry Chandler caught on to Brinkley's story and invited the doctor to perform the operation on one of his editors. California, however, was not one of the eight states in which Brinkley could practise. Chandler pulled local strings to win Brinkley a temporary 30-day medical licence. The result of this experiment could make Brinkley's name nationwide – Chandler claimed if it was a success he would become "the most famous surgeon in America", but if it failed his name would be "damned". Brinkley's operation was indeed a success, and Hollywood took notice. Soon, queues of movie stars were begging for appointments with Dr Brinkley to avail themselves of his miracle treatments. Here was a whole new audience the fake doctor could con, but his hopes were dashed when the California medical board denied him a permanent medical licence. Brinkley returned to Kansas, but he did leave one legacy behind in Hollywood: silent movies that had talkie sequences 'grafted' onto them became known as 'goat gland' movies!

While in Los Angeles, Brinkley had toured one of the Chandler-owned radio stations, KHJ. Broadcasting was in its infancy, but Brinkley immediately recognised how he could benefit from the new medium. The errant doctor quickly established his own radio station in Milford, dubbed KFKB (only the fourth commercial radio licence issued in the US). Brinkley took to the airwaves, broadcasting for hours and promoting the

LEFT: Brinkley at work in his Milford hospital. **BELOW:** Brinkley's nemesis, Morris Fishbein of the American Medical Association, who waged a lengthy campaign against the Goat Gland Doctor.

benefits of his 'goat gland' treatments. He recruited other sham experts in his own image, including astrologers, prognosticators, and lecturers. Brinkley sold Peruna ("to knock out the torture of colds") and Kolorbak ("scientifically imparts colour and charm to grey hair"), among other concoctions. Sales over the radio of so-called 'joy juice' alone generated $10,000 each week. Brinkley sold enough advertising for him to personally fund the installation of a modern sewer system in Milford, further endearing himself to his community. The Little League baseball team was renamed 'The Brinkley Goats' when he paid for their uniforms. He built a local bandstand and established a post office (largely to deal with his own huge volume of mail). His 5,000 watt transmitter ensured that Brinkley's ramblings reached both coasts, and KFKB became one of the most popular stations in America according to *Radio Digest* magazine. As Brinkley astutely noted: "Radio waves pay no attention to a line on a map." It was the Wild West for radio regulation at that stage, and Brinkley was a master of the power of suggestion.

Brinkley established a regular 'Medical Question Box', inviting listeners to send in details of their ailments. Naturally, he could offer a cure for everything, but solely through his 'patent medicines', available only through Brinkley Pharmaceutical Association-approved drug stores (a total of 500 across five states). The 'cure-all' treatments were sold at hugely inflated prices, with Brinkley generating $12 million profit each year. Instead of touring the country in a medicine show, Brinkley had found a modern way of bringing the people to him, and by using local affiliated pharmacies he could cater to their needs wherever they lived. However, while Brinkley was making a fortune through fraud, the forces ranged against him were beginning to close in.

BRINKLEY TOOK TO THE AIRWAVES TO PROMOTE HIS GOAT GLAND TREATMENTS

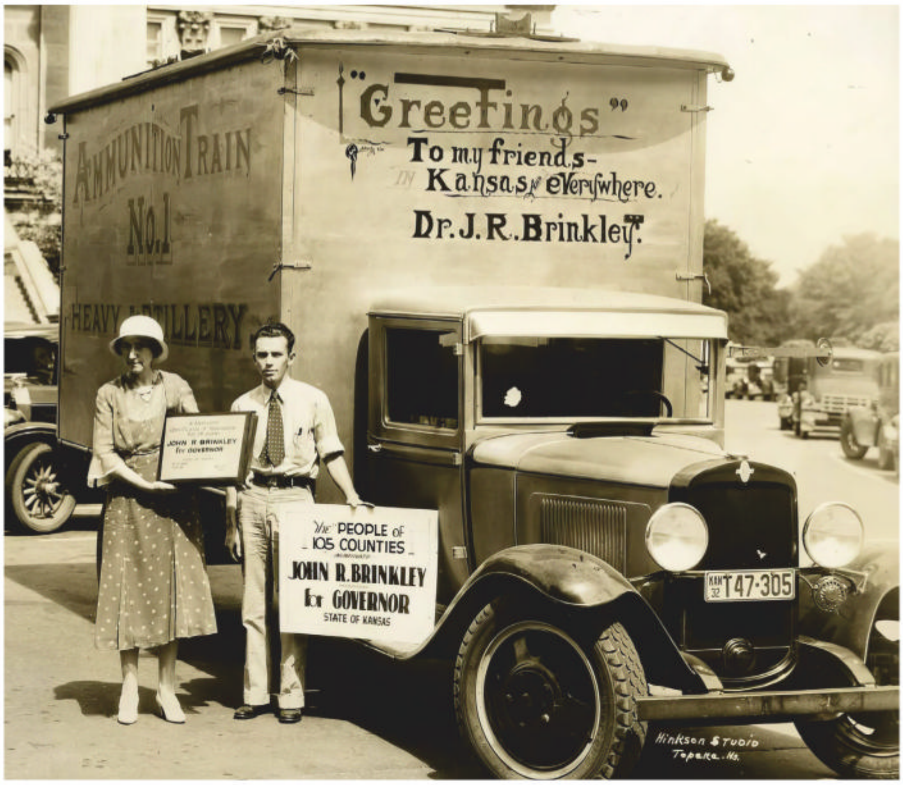
The American Medical Association (AMA) turned its attention to John Brinkley shortly after his first wave of publicity. Morris Fishbein was Brinkley's contemporary and editor of the *AMA Journal*. He was a campaigner against pseudoscience and a stickler for scientific and medical accuracy who gained a reputation as a quack-buster. He denounced practitioners of medically unproven treatments like homeopathy, Christian Science doctrine, and 'radionics' (electro-magnetic therapy). Fishbein paid particularly close attention to the dubious activities of John Brinkley.

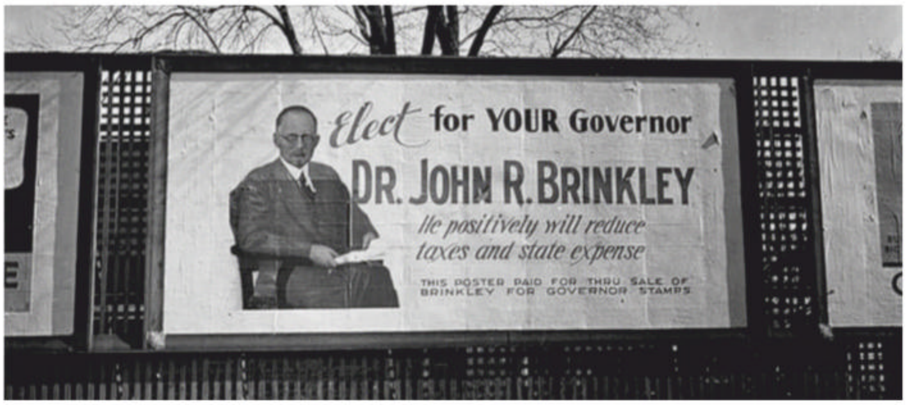
In 1924, in a move against the kind of diploma mills where Brinkley had obtained his medical degrees, the San Francisco grand jury issued 19 indictments to fake doctors, including Brinkley, who came to their attention over his failed application for a California medical license. When agents from California attempted Brinkley's arrest, he was saved by Kansas governor Jonathan M Davis, who refused to extradite him as he was too valuable to the State. Brinkley used his radio station to crow about his 'victory', further incensing Fishbein, whose mission was now to bring down the doctor.

Fishbein used the *AMA Journal* to publish a number of negative articles about Brinkley's medical malpractice, including case studies of patients who fell ill or died following the doctor's attentions. However, Brinkley's media savvy meant that many more people heard his positive stories and his shilling for quack cures over the radio waves than would ever read the niche *Journal*. Fishbein was helped by the dramatic increase in Brinkley's activities following the establishment of his radio station. Many of Brinkley's patients were going to other doctors after his treatments made them ill. The *Kansas City Star* took up Fishbein's anti-Brinkley campaign and ran a stream of unfavourable reports, culminating in claims that Brinkley had signed 42 death certificates for people who had no established illness when they attended his clinics.

The Kansas medical board held a hearing into Brinkley's activities, finally revoking his medical license with the claim that he "has performed an organised charlatanism". Six months later, the Federal Radio Commission (forerunner of the Federal Communications Commission) refused to renew Brinkley's broadcasting license, concluding that the majority of the content of his station was simply advertising and so "contrary to the public interest". Brinkley sued, but lost.

In response to losing both his medical and broadcasting license, Brinkley resorted to desperate tactics: he launched a bid to become Governor of Kansas in the 1930 gubernatorial election. This move into politics was unexpected, but perhaps unsurprising – the position would allow him to appoint his own supporters to the state's medical board, so ultimately regaining his medical license. He launched his bid for Governor just days after losing his license, so was able to use his radio station as a self-serving political propaganda outlet. Brinkley's campaign was purely populist, offering vaguely defined public works (new lakes), educational programmes


"Greetings"
To my friends - in Kansas & everywhere.
Dr. J.R. Brinkley.
Ammunition Train No. 1
Heavy Artillery
JOHN R. BRINKLEY for GOVERNOR
The PEOPLE of 105 COUNTIES
JOHN R. BRINKLEY for GOVERNOR
STATE OF KANSAS
T47-305
Hinkson Studio
Topeka, Ks.


Elect for YOUR Governor
DR. JOHN R. BRINKLEY
He positively will reduce taxes and state expense
THIS POSTER PAID FOR THRU SALE OF BRINKLEY FOR GOVERNOR STAMPS

ABOVE & BELOW: Brinkley used all kinds of modern publicity methods in his 1930 Kansas gubernatorial campaign, including a special 'For Governor' pin in the shape of a goat.

(free textbooks), and promising that political perennial, lower taxes. He brought representatives of various ethnic, political, and religious communities onto the airwaves to back his campaign and to encourage members of those communities to support him. He borrowed a plane from national hero Charles Lindbergh to fly him around campaigning events, and engaged in a series of publicity stunts. In all, John Brinkley was busy inventing the modern political media campaign.

He was, however, late to the field, so had to stand as a 'write-in' candidate as ballots had already been printed. Days before the vote, the Kansas attorney general (who'd earlier prosecuted Brinkley) changed the rules on write-in votes, requiring Brinkley's name to be written exactly as 'JR Brinkley' if the vote was to count. Any variation of his name ('John Brinkley' or 'Doc Brinkley', for example) would be discarded as a spoilt ballot. Brinkley secured almost 30 per cent of the vote, losing to Democrat Harry Woodring.

FOR GOVERNOR

The *Des Moines Register* estimated between 30,000 and 50,000 ballots for Brinkley had been discounted, more than enough to have swung the Governorship Brinkley's way. In fact, Brinkley could have argued his election had been 'stolen'. He ran again in 1932, increasing his vote but still losing narrowly.

HILLBILLY HOLLYWOOD

Stung by his political failure and the loss of his broadcasting licence, Brinkley sold KFKB and, as he could no longer practise, put a couple of his junior doctors in charge of the Milford clinic. He took his family to Del Rio, Texas, right on the Mexican border, and established a new radio station called XER, on the Mexican side, in October 1931, broadcasting into the US. Under pressure from Fishbein, the US State Department attempted to have the Mexican authorities close the station, but Brinkley was outside their jurisdiction.

Brinkley continued his medical business and his political campaigning, broadcasting from south of the border but reaching all the way up to Kansas. By 1932, he was transmitting a million-watt signal, making his renegade station the most powerful on the planet, reaching as far afield as Alaska, Canada and even Russia (where, legend has it, Brinkley's broadcasts were used to teach Russian spies English). He was up to his old tricks, promising to cure male impotence with a new concoction, Formula 1020, derived from goat glands and sold for $100 ($1,200 today). He sold airtime on XER at up to $1,700 per hour (about $27,000 today), inviting crazy hucksters and fellow charlatans to join him shilling for crystals, 'genuine' simulated diamonds, various bits of religious paraphernalia and personally signed photographs of Jesus Christ! There was plenty of country music between the pitches, so much so that Del Rio became known as 'Hillbilly Hollywood'. In fact, Brinkley was an accidental pioneer in the dissemination of 'mountain music' – country, and bluegrass – helping launch the Carter Family, Red Montana, Jimmie Rodgers and Gene Autry.

When in 1932, the FCC banned all 'spook' services – mind reading, séances, fortune tellers, and mystics – from the airwaves, an exodus of such practitioners followed Brinkley south, setting up their own border radio stations broadcasting into the US. Before the year was out, almost half-a-dozen such renegade stations were established. Pressure from the US mounted, causing the Mexican authorities to revoke Brinkley's licence for violating regulations against medical advertising. The station was raided by the Mexican Army. Brinkley fled, but was soon back on air thanks to a neighbouring rogue station, and later in 1935 he established another station of his own, dubbed XERA.

By now, he had cut all his ties with Milford, opening new medical facilities in the Roswell Hotel in Del Rio, where he lived with his wife and their young son, John Brinkley III. Brinkley expanded his medical repertoire to include various reproductive health services. The fake medic accumulated great wealth through his fraudulent activities, buying 16 acres in San Juan, Texas, where he built a huge mansion complete with swimming pool, private zoo, garages for his dozen Cadillacs, and a massive fountain. In 1936, the phoney doctor hired a filmmaker for a personal profile chronicling his lifestyle, mostly showing off his yachts and planes and boasting

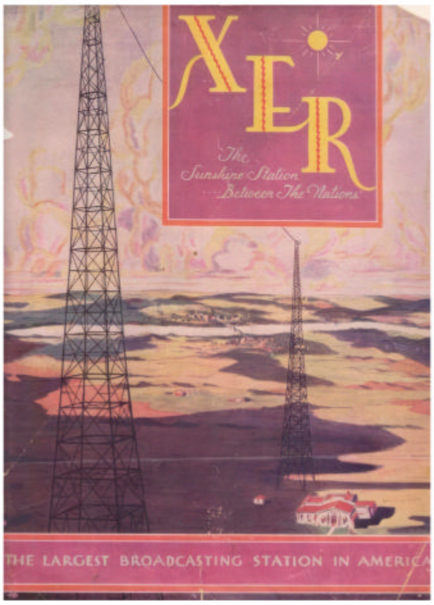
ABOVE LEFT: The Brinkley mansion in San Juan, Texas. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Brinkley was a radio pioneer whose XER border station (below) broadcast right across the US.

of all the birds and fish he'd killed. Among those Brinkley was rumoured to have helped with his medicines were President Woodrow Wilson, Rudolph Valentino, Huey Long and William Jennings Bryan.

When not operating or broadcasting, Brinkley was often a drunk and angry man. He once used an axe to attack the tires of a complaining Milford resident, bit the ear off a fellow doctor in a medical dispute, and pursued those who owed him money while drunk and brandishing a firearm. On air, he modelled his mix of religious, political and medical broadcasts after the so-called 'father of hate radio', Father William Coughlan, who broadcast to millions across the US about the dangers of Communism. During the later 1930s, Brinkley began to develop Nazi affiliations, hosting American Nazis like Fritz Kuhn, the leader of the German American Bund, and Fascist screenwriter William Pelley. Brinkley's swimming pool in San Juan was decorated with tiles featuring the Nazi swastika. Brinkley's backing of the Nazis was a key factor in him losing his third attempt to win the Texas Governorship as the German-descended population turned against the radio demagogue.

THE APOTHEOSIS OF QUACKERY

John Brinkley outwitted and outgunned his pursuers. He'd failed to win political office, but his big personality and the huge audiences he reached through radio brought him a great recognition factor. All of it boosted his bottom line, shifting his fake cures and no-hope medicines to thousands of gullible folk across the US. His activities brought him great wealth, but he couldn't escape forever. In 1938, Morris Fishbein relaunched his anti-Brinkley campaign with a vengeance, publishing a series under the title 'Modern Medical Charlatans' that chronicled Brinkley's unethical activities: "In John R Brinkley," he wrote, "quackery reaches its apotheosis."


XER
The Sunshine Station Between The Nations
THE LARGEST BROADCASTING STATION IN AMERICA

Brinkley sued Fishbein for libel, demanding $250,000 in damages ($5 million today). The 1939 trial saw the judge quickly declare Brinkley "should be considered a charlatan and a quack in the ordinary and well-understood meaning of those words". The most damaging witness at the trial was Brinkley himself, as the 'doctor' couldn't explain how his transplant process was supposed to be effective, despite carrying out hundreds of operations. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) began to investigate Brinkley for tax fraud, causing the doctor to declare bankruptcy in January 1941. That same year, the Mexican authorities finally shut down his second radio station. (In the 1950s, the revived XERA hired DJ Robert Weston Smith and 'Wolfman Jack' was born!)

In the wake of all this stress and with multiple civil suits looming, Brinkley's health collapsed. None of his wonder potions could help him as he suffered a series of heart attacks and saw one of his legs amputated due to poor circulation. He dropped dead in May 1942 of heart failure, aged only 56, just before a US Postal Service mail fraud action was due to come to trial. He was buried in Memphis, Tennessee. His tombstone read: "JR Brinkley MD"; in death, he was finally a doctor. Brinkley's alleged last words concerned his sworn enemy: "If Dr Fishbein goes to Heaven, I want to go the other way." It's likely the notorious goat gland man got his final wish.

Brinkley was a pioneer in the fields of media and medicine, a charlatan who figured out how to manipulate audiences into coughing up for his fake cures. He presaged much of the later 20th century, with Hitler and others picking up on the power of radio (as well as film and, later, television) as a vehicle for propaganda. His attempts to win political office paved the way for the likes of Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump, who used their media celebrity to win the White House. Brinkley's mixing of mass media propaganda (radio was his Twitter) and quack medicine persists to this day. Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop products have been criticised as 'snake oil', while right wing radio host Alex Jones, known for his inflammatory political commentary, made his money hawking useless dietary vitamin supplements and compounds containing iodine and citric acid. In London, Harley Street clinics promote 'stem cell miracle treatments' for everything from chronic lung disease to cancer, strokes, and – yes – erectile dysfunction. For all that society believes itself to be wiser in the 21st century, the success of these media-driven medical 'miracle cures' suggests people are as gullible as they ever were.

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BRIAN J ROBB is a regular FT contributor, a Founding Editor of the Sci-Fi Bulletin website and the author of books on Buster Keaton, Philip K Dick, Steampunk, Star Trek and Tolkien's Middle Earth among others.

POLITICAL SCIENCE

TOTALITARIAN ABUSES OF SCIENCE, FROM HITLER AND STALIN TO PUTIN'S RUSSIA

In an extract from his new book *Hitler's & Stalin's Misuse of Science*, **SD TUCKER** talks Communist corpuscles, Nazi nuclei and NATO-backed mutant homosexual potatoes from outer-space…

Science is the most objective of all spheres of human knowledge – isn't it? Not when blinkered dictators like Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin march headlong into the laboratory it isn't. Then, it becomes every bit as governed by lies, prejudice and the twisting of facts as everything else under quasi-religious dictatorial faiths like Nazism or Communism is. So as contemporary science becomes ever more ensnared within a web of competing political ideologies, perhaps we should look to the past for cautionary evidence of just where such processes can lead. Could such horrors unfold again today? They already have.

Here, I explore three strange cases of science being abused to suit contrasting extremist political ideologies: one each from the Third Reich, USSR and Vladimir Putin's Russia. It's happening here in the West, too, but you'll have to read my book to find out about all that…

LEFT: Aleksander Bogdanov in a cabinet card photograph from 1904.

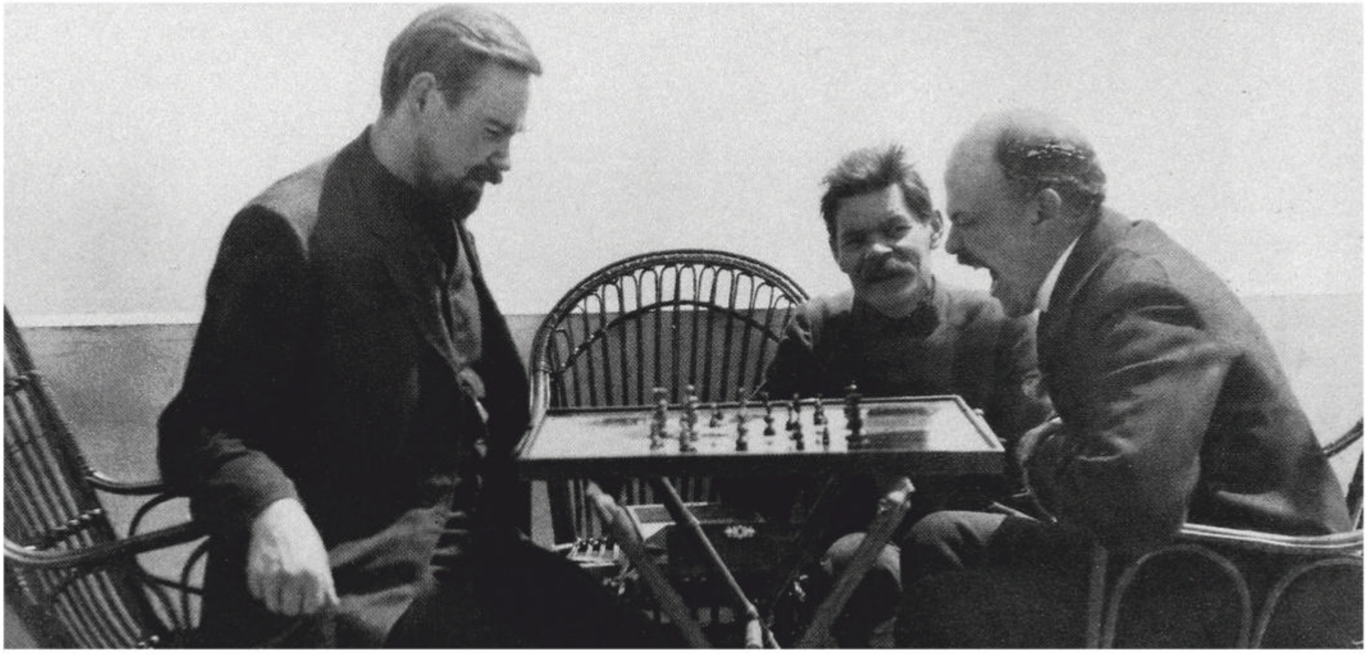
RED BLOOD

One of Lenin's main leadership rivals amongst the early Bolshevik elite was the polymath Aleksandr Bogdanov (1873-1928), the man who discovered life on Mars. Bogdanov unearthed the amazing fact that in 1905 – long before Yuri Gagarin – a pioneering Russian Cosmonaut named Leonid had been abducted in an atom-powered, egg-shaped spacecraft dubbed an 'etheroneph' and treated to a guided tour of the socialist utopia already long established up there on the appropriately Red Planet. After admiring Mars's famous canals, true marvels of State engineering, the awe-struck abductee was given a guided tour of an ET NHS hospital by a friendly alien physician, Dr Netti, their comprehensive free-at-point-of-use healthcare system being one of the Marxist Martians' proudest achievements. The healthy life spans of his superhuman species, Dr Netti explained, were much longer than those of their primitive cousins on Earth, due to the fact that Martian medicine did not merely treat illness when it arose, it acted pre-emptively *"to renew life"* by the following methods, which were "actually very simple", once devised. In Dr N's own words:

HE CONSIDERED BLOOD A 'UNIVERSAL' TISSUE CONNECTING ALL CELLS TOGETHER

"Of course, you are acquainted with blood-serum transfusions and the way in which they transmit elements of vitality from one being to another… We go even further and perform mutual blood-transfusions *between human beings [i.e. Martians] … Such an exchange involves merely pumping the blood of one person into another and back again by means of devices which connect their respective circulatory systems. If all precautions are taken, it is a perfectly safe procedure. The blood of one person continues to live in the organism of the other, where it mixes with his own blood and thoroughly regenerates all his tissues … [However] a young person will not age from the blood of an old one … [You Earthlings should have discovered this yourselves centuries ago, but did not] due to your predominantly individualist psychology [derived from capitalism], which isolates people from one another so completely that the thought of fusing them [into one collective whole] is almost incomprehensible to your scientists."*

Regrettably, the above account, whilst framed as the recovered manuscript testimony of the alien abductee in question, actually comes from an early science fiction novel called *Red Star*, published in 1908 by Comrade Bogdanov; but, to Bogdanov, science fiction novels were really just science-fact waiting to happen. Aleksandr was not only one of the founding-members of the Bolshevik Party in 1903, but also a writer, philosopher, scientist and trained physician. As such, Dr Netti's description of reciprocal blood-transfusions was no idle fantasy – it was something Bogdanov intended to actually enact as soon as he could. When in 1926, with Stalin's support, Bogdanov



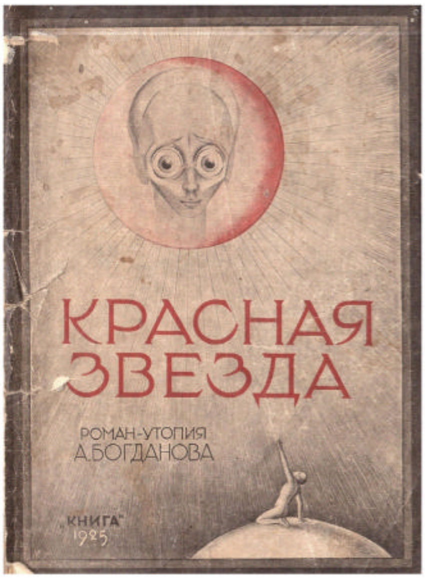
WORLD HISTORY ARCHIVE / ALAMY

became Director of the new Soviet Institute of Hæmatology and Blood-Transfusion, he quickly tried to create the world's first-ever form of collectivist blood-transfusion, a procedure which has been termed an attempt at "rendering Communism a biological fact".

Due to regular blood-sharing, Bogdanov's Martians became a new, more highly-evolved species, quasi-androgynous with larger eyes, brains and skulls, greater resistance to disease and longer life-spans than normal humans; might real-life *Homo Sovieticus* (a genuine concept in the USSR) Russians one day do the same, thanks to Marxist medicine? To Bogdanov, blood was an inherently Communist fluid. Whilst each individual organ of the human body existed somewhat separately from one another, as deviant fleshly embodiments of bourgeois individualism, blood was considered by him a "universal" tissue connecting all human cells together simultaneously. Blood was the essence of the general human organism, its chemical composition reflecting the overall state of any man's health at any given moment. Analyse it, and you may find your patient has a healthy heart but failing kidneys. Analyse a second patient's blood, and you may find he has a failing heart but healthy kidneys. So, if you pump a certain amount of each patient's serum into their opposite number's veins, the two bloodstreams should compensate for one another, lending *each* a healthy heart and kidneys.

The blood of blooming Marxist youth might well even rejuvenate the bodies of the Party's first revolutionaries, making them feel young and alive again. Bogdanov actually tried this theory out on the aged and anæmic commissar Leonid Krasin, claiming positive results. Besides their plasma, maybe people could also swap their physical skills: patients could 'donate' their excellent eyesight, stamina or reaction times to their fellow tube-people, in a form of instant, blood-borne evolution. Even better, why not tap the blood of committed Marxists and flood the veins of non-believers with it, thus rendering them automatically Communist without the need for any tedious and time-consuming re-education sessions? All humanity would become, quite literally, Bolshevik blood-brothers.

This was to be the basis of a future "physiological collectivism"; if you connect many people's veins and let their blood pool into one diverse whole, like millions of tiny rivers flowing into one big lake, would you not create some form of hyper-healthy, ultra-immune, *Homo Sovieticus* Communist demi-god



ABOVE: Bogdanov (left) plays chess with Lenin (right) while visiting Russian writer Maxim Gorky in Capri, 1908. **LEFT:** Bogdanov's 1908 socialist science fiction novel *Red Star*. **BELOW:** In 1926, Bogdanov became director of the new Soviet Institute of Hæmotology and Blood Transfusion, housed in the mansion of a former Moscow merchant.

COMPLICITE

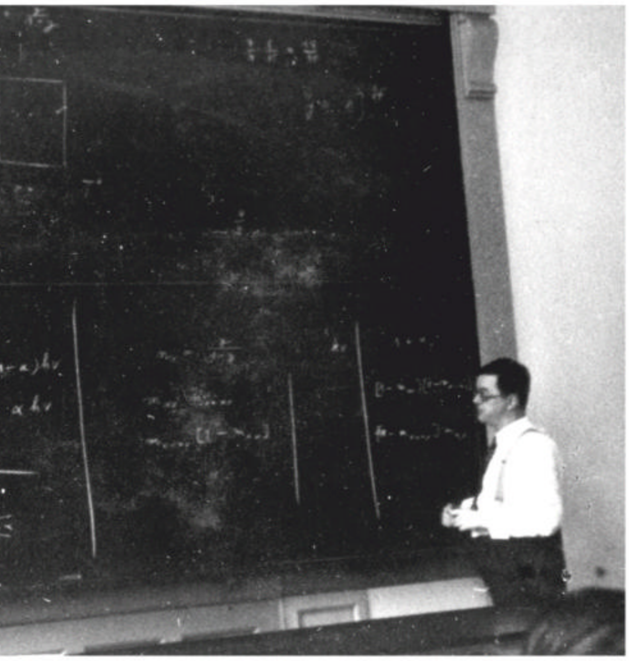
ABOVE: Mikhail Bulgakov (below) wrote a 1925 satire on Bogdanov's experiments, later turned into an equally dark opera by Russian composer Alexander Raskatov and staged by ENO/Complicité in 2010. **BELOW:** Pascual Jordan stands in front of a blackboard in a lecture hall at the Copenhagen Conference at the Bohr Insitute in 1936.

like those on Bogdanov's Mars? That was the optimistic viewpoint. The pessimistic one implied you might equally sire a race of mega-invalids, their veins tainted by the collective organ-failures of their fellow patients. There was only one way to find out: human experimentation. Bogdanov opted to research upon himself, not upon some handy gulag-inmates, participating in 11 blood-exchange trials which he felt improved his eyesight and stopped him going bald. In 1928, he sought to repay his debt to Soviet youth in "comradely vital exchange" by infusing his own healthy blood into a young student infected with tuberculosis, a disease to which he wrongly felt immune. The student ultimately recovered, but Bogdanov died two weeks later, suffering acute kidney and liver-failure, aged only 54. Despite Bogdanov receiving the honour of an official State funeral, his successors at the Institute did not pursue his ideas any further.

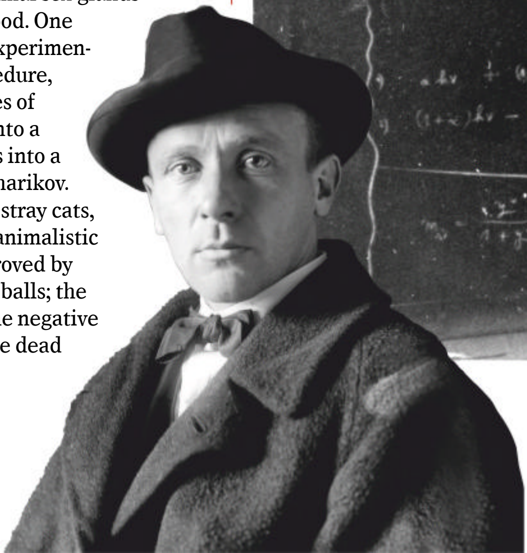
In 1925 sceptical fabulist Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940) penned an underground *samizdat* novella, *Heart of A Dog*, satirising Bogdanov's activities. Here, Dr Filip Preobrazhensky ('Dr Transfiguration') injects worn-out Party functionaries with refreshing doses of animal sex-glands rather than human blood. One day Preobrazhensky experimentally reverses his procedure, implanting the testicles of a deceased alcoholic into a stray dog, who mutates into a half-breed dog-man, Sharikov. Given a job strangling stray cats, Sharikov's previously animalistic personality is not improved by the infusion of human balls; the dog-man inherits all the negative personality-traits of the dead donor, too. When Sharikov denounces his creator to the secret-police – something no non-evolved dog would have been able to do – Dr Preobrazhensky castrates Sharikov, turning the humanoid canine again. When the novella was finally legally published in the USSR during President Gorbachev's liberalising social reforms of the 1980s, it was read as a satire of Bogdanov-style dreams of birthing a New Soviet Man (as *Homo Sovieticus* was also sometimes dubbed). If produced by a rotten system, this New Man would by definition carry all the flaws of that same system within it by unavoidable design of its creators, whether they realised it or not, just like beastly Sharikov. The plan to create New Soviet Man could lead only to a race of New Soviet Monsters instead.

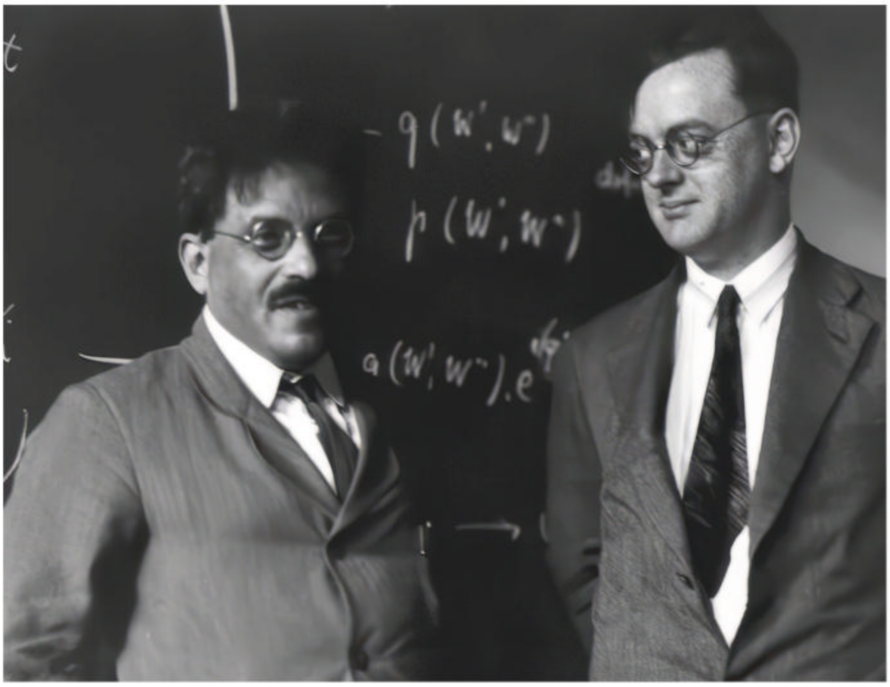
THE NUCLEUS OF NAZISM

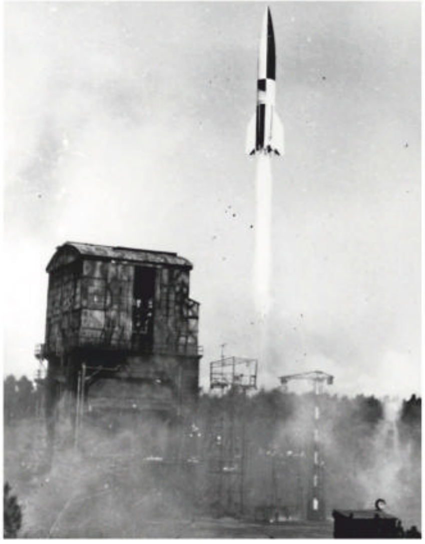
Although of part-Spanish stock rather than a full, pure-blooded Aryan, Pascual Jordan (1902-1980) was one of the Third Reich's leading quantum physicists, and a committed opponent of the previously prevailing ideal of scientific objectivity. Despite being an anti-Semite, he knew full well several Jewish physicists had made essential contributions to understanding the quantum world. So, Jordan actively embraced devils like Einstein, but on peculiar grounds: with their discoveries, they had inadvertently revealed



AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS







LEFT: Pascual Jordan (at right) with fellow physicist Paul Ehrenfest, an Austrian jew, in the 1920s. **BELOW:** For Jordan, German weonder-weapons like the V-2 rocket embodied Nazi scientific superiority.

the Universe itself was built upon inherently Nazi principles – a truly cosmic irony.

From the early 1930s, Jordan had written pseudonymous opinion columns in the nationalist journal *Deutsches Volkstum*, bemoaning Marxism and the amoral, secular liberalism of the interwar German Weimar Republic of 1919-1933. The best means of national salvation, he told readers, was to develop new forms of science and technology to re-enchant the nation, unleashing total civilisational transformation. Come the Nazis' election in 1933, Jordan officially joined up as a stormtrooper, dropping his pen-name. Examined correctly, he now said, Nature itself could be seen as perfectly mirrored in Nazism, and fascism revealed as a natural physical law within the political realm. Hitler's Nazi laws were equally as valid as Newton's gravitational laws, in all places and at all times; Hitler had not *invented* his programme for government, he had *discovered* it, like Newton with gravity.

For example, every biologist knew that each living cell possessed a nucleus that acted as its metaphorical 'brain', directing the rest of the cell's activities in the wider body. Yet only a Nazi would be able to interpret this finding correctly, as proving such directing nuclei were tiny versions of fascist dictators, "endowed with dictatorial authority" over their subservient cell-components like mitochondria; a living embodiment of the *Führerprinzip* of National Socialism, which allowed the man at the top of the Nazi tree to tell his mitochondrial underlings among the German people to do whatever he told them to immediately, no questions asked. The human body was thus quite literally made up of an entire battalion of Little Hitlers. Likewise, the inevitable orbiting of subatomic particles around their parent nuclei also functioned to illustrate the natural world's *Führerprinzip* in action. That the Jewish left-winger Einstein had first formulated the Theory of Relativity was thus trivial; as a non-Nazi, he had scant chance of understanding its true nature.

HITLER'S NAZI EMPIRE WAS A GEOPOLITICAL EXPRESSION OF QUANTUM REALITY

But you can't really see little swastikas stamped on cell nuclei or atoms, so how could Jordan pretend his theory that Nature was a Nazi was not just delusional? Jordan was attracted to holism, the idea that things could only be fully understood as organic wholes, rather than in isolation; unaccompanied, a cell nucleus made no sense, its function could only be understood in relation to the other components of the cell; just as if you looked at a pendulum alone, you would never guess the function of the complete clock. Quantum giant Nils Bohr was of the opinion a similar relationship existed between human psychology and physiology, that the boundary between matter and psyche was more indefinite than hitherto suspected. Jordan agreed. Did not known facets of quantum mechanics, like the famously puzzling 'observer effect', which held the mere fact of a human experimenter observing an experiment influenced its outcome, imply that mind could influence matter? Intermediate states between subject and object may thus be possible; Jordan suggested telepathy should be subjected to serious research across the Third Reich, welcoming the prospect of broadcasting propaganda direct into people's minds. The boundary between the self and the world thus became shifting and indefinite. Might not the truly Nazi scientist, with his celebrated Nietzschean determination, be able to influence physical reality itself by sheer force of iron will, just like a psychic moving distant objects around via psychokinesis?

The supernatural elimination of the gap between self and world seemed highly compatible with totalitarian modes of government; the erasure of any boundary between the individual and the society which now controlled his every waking moment, and the wiping out of national borders and absorption of formerly separate lands like Poland and Austria into a Greater German Reich, became analogous to the removal of the distinction between mind and matter. Everything was now becoming unified under Jordan's quantum *Führerprinzip*, just as the living cell was unified by the dictatorial nucleus. Hitler was a holist, his Nazi Empire a geopolitical expression of quantum reality, and to put up any resistance to the laws of Nature was futile. This was why superior Nazi armaments – *Wunderwaffen*, or 'Wonder-Weapons', like the V-2 ballistic missile upon whose deployment Jordan himself worked – had such miraculous effects upon the battlefield. Nazis, being scientific laws humanly embodied, had access to superior science to that of their politically inferior enemies, and thus it was inevitable their weapons would be superior too. Trying to defeat Nazism was like trying to defeat the laws of gravity: impossible. Might was now right – not only morally, but also scientifically. Or that's what Jordan himself thought, anyway; in the end, history proved him wrong.

ABOVE LEFT: Peter Garyaev feeding bodily information waves into his computer. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Irina Ermakova argues that GM foods are Western bio-weapons designed to wreak havoc with Russian genes. **BELOW:** The one-time businessman turned pseudoscientist German Sterligov – more Orthodox than the Russian Orthodox Church.

DMITRY ROZHKOV / CREATIVE COMMONS

DOMESTIC SCIENCE

One man seeking to imitate Stalin and Hitler by twisting science to serve his own particular geopolitical ends today is Russia’s current dictator, Vladimir Putin. The prevailing Kremlin narrative is that woke Western liberals and their governments seek to colonise Russians’ minds with capitalism, gay rights, transgenderism, McDonald’s, iPhones and multiculturalism and that this must be patriotically resisted by all means possible, including scientifically.

But if Westerners can peddle scientifically dubious progressive biological concepts like transgenderism, why should Russians not be sold equally dodgy conservative biological ideas too? According to one 2016 academic paper promoted by Russian media, swearing in front of girls has the capacity to cause a “negative energy-physiological effect” upon the female body, even changing its DNA. If a woman then starts swearing herself, “she provokes the production of male hormones inside her and acquires masculine features in appearance: her hairline increases, her voice becomes coarser.” Asked for the source of this information by a sceptical scientist, the paper’s author more-or-less answered ‘I saw it on the Internet’.

The social purpose of such quackery is clear: to reinforce traditional gender roles. Much such thinking stems from the work of Peter Garyaev, founding director of the Institute of Quantum Genetics, who, like Russia’s all-time greatest (or worst) Soviet-era pseudoscientist Trofim Lysenko, argues Western concepts of genetics are wrong. Unlike Lysenko, he believes in DNA, but thinks genetic data is stored as a bodily “information wave”, transforming people into “quantum biocomputers”: human genes remember and react to words, explaining how women might turn into men when sworn at. This has allowed Garyaev to develop a cure for cancer. All patients do is send in a personal photo to be fed into a computer and converted into an audio sound file representing their faulty genes. These are then “fixed” into a new audio gene-map with all the sounds of cancerous cells replaced by new sounds representing healthy ones. Patients listen to this new sound file, the DNA inside their bodies hears it too, and automatically heals itself to tune in with the curative DNA soundtrack. Furthermore, a woman’s clever womb can remember the sperm of her former lovers, says Garyaev, meaning that, even if you later get pregnant from the genetic load of a fine, upstanding husband like Mr Putin, the womb-memory of the tadpoles of any former, less impressive lovers during your dissolute youth will still continue to taint your future baby: bad luck, then, if you slept with a criminal, moron, foreigner or drug-addict as a teen. Worse, as human sperm apparently emits a powerful “photon field”, it does not even have to touch wombs to be remembered, merely be *heard* by them: so “even if you put on a steel condom it will not help you”. Thankfully, playing special sounds of healthy sperm into your vagina prior to pregnancy can counteract these effects somewhat. Deteriorating sexual morals, not economic depression or mass alcoholism, are the cause of Russia’s decades-long population decline Garyaev assures State TV viewers, urging them to stop polluting their wombs, settle down, get married and produce large broods of future tax-payers and soldiers for Uncle Vlad instead.

SCIENCE ITSELF IS A SATANIC CONSPIRACY THAT CAUSES SPIRITUAL DECAY

Russia’s most extreme conservative pseudoscientist today is surely German Sterligov (b.1966), a man who self-identifies so strongly as an Orthodox Christian that he refuses to be a member of the Russian Orthodox Church… as it’s simply nowhere near Orthodox enough for him. Instead, after becoming a millionaire in the early post-Soviet days and making several failed attempts to enter politics, he bought his own farm, selling organic produce in a chain of health-food shops bearing signs saying ‘No faggots allowed!’ in their windows. According to Sterligov, science itself is a Satanic conspiracy that causes spiritual decay, so he hands out free eggs to shoppers to throw at large posters of famous scientists like Einstein, who are “poisoning humanity” with unnecessary technology and pollution.

Sterligov has two main public policy proposals. Firstly, he wants Putin to sign a decree authorising the execution of all scientists in Russia on the grounds they are actually Satanists. Russia should be the first nation to trigger this global genocide so as to set a fine example of “the godly deed of cleansing the Earth” for all other lands to

ASSOCIATED PRESS / ALAMY STOCK

ABOVE: Meet the Sterligovs (left to right): Pelageya, Mikhei, Panteleymon, Alyona, German, Sergiy and Arseniy, on their farm in the village of Nizhnevasilyevskoye, northwest of Moscow, in 2008. Presumably, there's no electricity and Satanic scientists aren't welcome.

follow. Next, the world's entire electricity supply must be forcibly cut off and every person on the planet be forced to live off the land on a farm as Sterligov does, leading to mankind's total moral regeneration via perpetual serfdom.

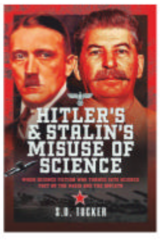
Sterligov feels Western-developed GM foods are a key part of the Satanist scientists' plot to destroy us all. So does Irina Ermakova (b.1952), a neuroscientist who made headlines in 2005 with flawed research implying that feeding GM soybeans to rats made them produce stunted babies with low survival-rates. Ermakova then embarked upon a media career, promoting the idea that GM foods were US-backed Western bioweapons designed to ruin the genes of Russian consumers by rendering them infertile, cancer-ridden, gay or transgender. Allegedly, if pregnant women eat GM potatoes their female fœtuses are born with spare penises poking out of their vaginas – hence a supposed boom in intersex babies across the West, while mild infant cases of potato-hermaphroditism later manifest as confused teens who don't know whether they are boys or girls. Genetically modified gays and lesbians can't have children naturally, thus causing a massive drop in global population levels, says Ermakova, which is the desire of the plot's true evil master-minds – not Americans, but extraterrestrials, who gave Washington the special potatoes in the first place and use Earth as a giant bio-warfare test lab. Ermakova even spoke to one poor woman who ate some GM soya beans and "became completely disabled".

GM foods, in Ermakova's view, are invisible queer atom-bombs, already unleashed by NATO upon Ukraine, which is why their population was increasingly turning Westwards towards Gay Europa: Kievans were innocently eating GM foods and having their brains bent. GM products and Western capitalism cause the "spiritual and biological destruction of genes and brain-cells" and "the strengthening of criminal structures" within society. Thankfully, the "non-standard thinking of Russian scientists", together with their "high moral standards" provides an easy way out: the banning of GM crops.

Ermakova's platform is highly mainstream: she is frequently called as an expert witness before the Russian parliament's State Agriculture Committee. Partly as a result of her insane testimony, since 2016 growing GM crops is now banned in Russia, as 80 per cent of propagandised citizens wrongly believe them to be harmful. Interestingly, only about a third of Russians know that all crops contain genes anyway, incorrectly presuming evil Westerners actually *insert* such deviant items into foodstuffs prior to sale! The irony is that the small-print of GM-banning legislation quietly says such products can still be imported for direct sale in shops, thus rendering the entire campaign wholly pointless except as an exercise in fostering politically helpful anti-Western hysteria.

Why do so many Russians believe all this loony Lysenkoism? They probably look at some of our Western politicians' own current obsessions – and the 'science' behind them – and ask themselves much the same thing.

➻ **SD TUCKER** is the author of numerous books about topics as varied as weird science, aberrant economics, historical eccentrics, medical quackery and strange ideas about outer space. A regular contributor to FT, he writes the magazine's 'Strange Statesmen' column.



Hitler's & Stalin's Misuse of Science: When Science Fiction Was Turned Into Science Fact By the Nazis and Soviets by SD Tucker is published in hardback by Pen & Sword/Frontline Books and is out now. (£25, ISBN: 9781399073158).

MERMAIDS AND MANIMALS OF SUFFOLK

In an extract from his new book on the mystery animals of Suffolk, **MATT SALUSBURY** tackles some of the oddest putative denizens of that curious county – from freshwater mermaids with a remit to terrify local children to dog-headed men and red-haired werewolves...

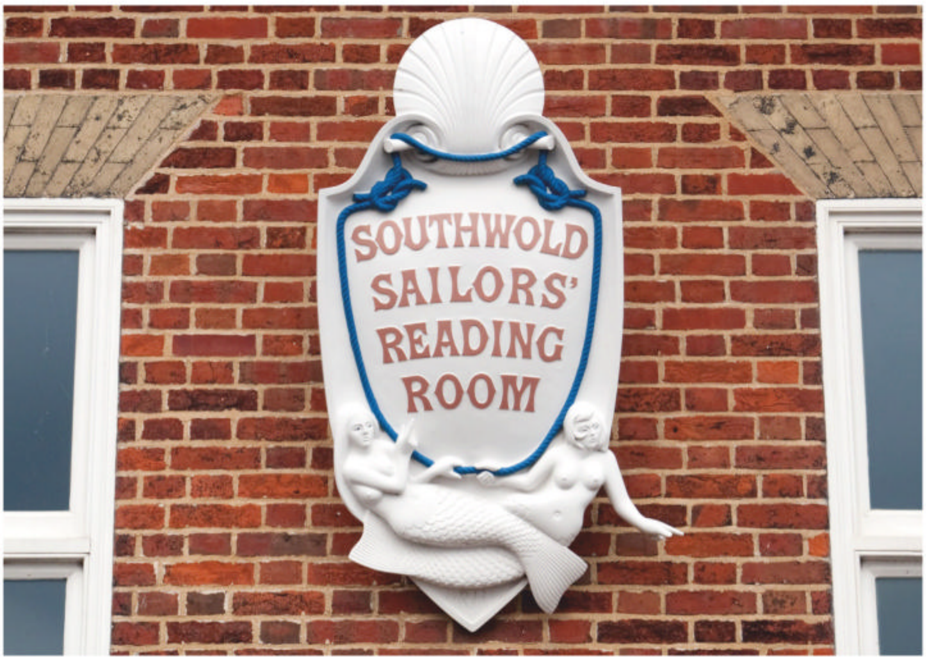
MIRA66 / FLICKR / CREATIVE COMMONS

In the *Ipswich Journal* of 27 May 1721 there appeared the following plea from a letter writer: "Pray resolve me in your next Week's Paper, whether there be any such Thing in Nature as Mermen and Mermaids, I being not yet satisfied in the verity thereof, notwithstanding the Reports of Seamen and others." The vexed reader of the *Ipswich Journal* may well have believed in mermaids, possibly because his parents had told him from an early age to believe in mermaids (as they might convince their infants to believe in Father Christmas today). His parents would have a very practical reason for doing so, as we will see.

MIND THE MERMAIDS

With the possible exception of the Orford "merman" found by fishermen off the coast at Orford Ness and described by mediæval chronicler Ralph of Coggeshall (**FT318:28-33**), Suffolk's merfolk were all female – mermaids rather than mermen. And "Reports of Seamen" didn't feature in Suffolk mermaid traditions. The Orford merman – possibly just a human gone feral – was the only merperson found off the coast, as all the Suffolk mermaids were freshwater specimens, found in the county's rivers, lakes, wells, pools and even its drainage ditches.

Rendlesham had a "Mermaid's Pond," also known as the S-pond, as it was shaped like a letter "S". A reader of the *Ipswich Journal* in the 1870s – a man who wrote to the newspaper describing his childhood there some 50 years earlier – recalled there were trees around the edge of the S-shaped pond at one end, and the grass around it "in early spring full of flowers." (It's near Cottage Wood and a tumulus, and now just north of the sewage works.) But if our *Ipswich Journal* reader who was a boy back in 1814 strayed too near the edge of the pond, "our nursemaid would call out to us not to go so near 'lest the mermaid should come'" and hook him and his playmates in with a crome fork, which was a sort of rake with curved teeth, used as a muckraker.[1]



KUMAR SRISKANDAN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

FACING PAGE: A fetching 'Meremayd' on the exterior of 17 Fore Street, Ipswich. It was created in 1974 on the site of a previous building, apparently at one time the Mermaid Inn. **LEFT:** Mermaids lure sailors away from the bottle and into the Southwold Sailors' Reading Room. **BELOW:** The Bury Silver Spoon factory, once home to mermaids, then to sugar beets.

The author of *The Book of Days* wrote in the 1860s how he was told by one Suffolk child that mermaids were "them nasty things what crome you into the water," while another child from the county told him he'd actually seen a mermaid once, "a grit hig thing loike a feesh." Kate Welham of Bacton, near Stowmarket, recalled being told as a child in around 1908 to stay away from mermaid-infested ponds. [2]

Just outside Bury St Edmunds in Babwell Fen Meadows, once the private fishing lake of the Abbot of St Edmundsbury, there was in the mid-19th century "an abundance of beautiful water" fed by springs, and in "the low grounds" near the road. (This is probably what's now the Fornham Road.) A mermaid was to be found in the body of water then known as the Mermaid's Pits. They were named after a "love-sick maid" who had drowned herself there, and who then turned into a mermaid; whether or not she was an evil mermaid who pulled in children wasn't known, but there was supposed to be an "abundance" of mermaids in the drainage ditches and ponds locally. Local mothers warned their children to stay away from these. There's now a Mermaid Close here, just off the Fornham Road, with a small body of water nearby. [3]

A look at Google Earth shows some features round there that appear on older maps as pools, but have now been drained. Some of the Mermaid's Pits may have fallen on hard times, ending up as the settling ponds at what's now the Silver Spoon factory. It was previously the British Sugar factory, manufacturing raw sugar from sugar beet in a process that involved washing the beets in a lot of water, which had to end up somewhere. For this reason sugar factories tended to be built near where there was a ready supply of water. The smell of sugar beet tended to attract coypus, and the East Anglian sugar factory settling ponds usually had a "terrible smell" attached to them, according to a source who worked in other East Anglian sugar plants back in the 1970s. You can still see the silos of the Bury Silver Spoon plant as a landmark near the station, with big piles of sugar beet often stacked nearby. In any event, these settling ponds today would be no place fit for a freshwater mermaid to lurk, however evil.

THERE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AN ABUNDANCE OF MERMAIDS IN THE DRAINAGE DITCHES

A short distance from Bury St Edmunds, on the River Lark at Fornham All Saints and just a little bit further up river at Hengrave, there was said to be a mermaid, either in the river or in the well. The mermaid – apparently without the use of a curved rake – would grab and drown children who ventured too close or even touched the water. There was also a phantom woman on a horse who was seen to ride across the surface of the nearby mere (lake) on certain days of the year. The ghost story writer MR James grew up nearby, at Great Livermere, and penned many a short story about "antiquarians" researching the more peculiar corners of forgotten Suffolk history and archæology and ending up meeting a sticky end at the hands of some ancient malevolent East Anglian entity that they'd stirred up (see **FT292:30-37**). The area around Fornham All Saints, with its massive Neolithic and Bronze Age monument (now threatened by housing development), inspired James's ominously-titled ghost story "A Warning to the Curious". [4]

The people of the fens were thought (by others) to have some fairy or mermaid blood in them, or were believed to be born web-footed. The "half-mermaid" fen-dweller girls in particular were feared. It was whispered of them that they loved to play near pools and dykes and push their normal playmates in.

There was yet another freshwater mermaid said to live somewhere in Suffolk's River Gipping at some unknown point in history. The mermaid that frequented the Gipping would prey on children who played near the deeper waters of the river. Then there's The Mermaid pub on the banks of the River Gipping, the old Stowmarket Navigation canal at the point where the London Road crosses it in Ipswich, just before it comes out into the Orwell. As it

DAVID J GREEN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

wasn't clear exactly where the mermaid was to be found, it was wise for children to stay away from the Gipping altogether. The entity in Wimbell Pond near Acton, just east of Long Melford, may or may not have been a mermaid. A chest of money is said to lie at the bottom of the pond. Those who have thrown stones into the pond have heard it make a ringing noise as it strikes the chest, and seen a small white figure whimpering, "That's mine."[5]

You've probably already guessed the perfectly rational explanation for all of Suffolk's freshwater mermaids. Until recently, Suffolk children were expected to be out of the house and out and about all day, and not expected to show up again until teatime. The temptation to play – unsupervised – near ponds, lakes, drainage ditches, rivers and meres was great. Parents made up stories about absolutely lethal and terrifying mermaids living in these bodies of water in an attempt to keep their children away from them. In other parts of England, there were witches, instead of mermaids, living in wells.

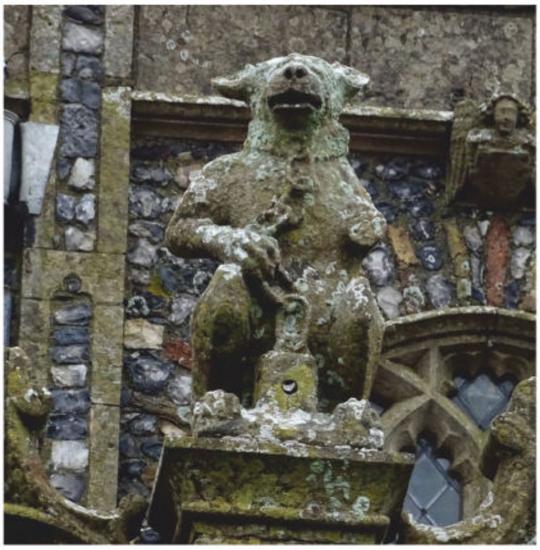
MATT SALLUSBURY

THE GINGER WEREWOLF OF THE EAST ENGLAND COAST

Via Nick Redfern comes a story "passed down from generation to generation from a family in Kent", about the Shirley family, who were picnicking in "an area of woodland" on the East Coast of England sometime at the end of the 1940s. Pat Shirley had been told the story by her grandfather, who was there, but she wouldn't tell Redfern exactly where the incident had happened (or possibly by the time the story had been passed down to her, the location had been forgotten).

Pat Shirley's grandfather told her that during their woodland picnic somewhere on the East Coast, he'd caught the briefest of glimpses of a werewolf-like manbeast "covered in flaming red hair" and "possessing a pair of huge and powerful jaws." It then vanished into the trees.[6]

A look at an atlas shows that wooded stretches of the East of England coast – from the Thames Estuary in Essex and all the way up to Lincolnshire – are limited. There's nothing very much going on by way of noticeable woodland near the coast anywhere in Essex. Nor is there anything noteworthy by way of woodlands on the Lincolnshire coast either. So a wooded stretch of coast in the East of England would probably be in Norfolk or Suffolk. Some stretches of the Suffolk coast with woodland nearby do spring to mind – around Sizewell, along the Dunwich coast as far as Dingle, and if you strayed inland from Walberswick beach you'd find yourself along some farm tracks and bridleways lined with dense avenues of trees on both sides. Benacre and Covehithe have woods close to the shore, and right behind Aldeburgh (away from the beach) there are woods.



DOGS HEAD STREET

LEFT: A dog-headed man – or is it a ginger werewolf or perhaps a bear? – on the roof of Blythburgh Church. **BELOW LEFT:** A sign for Dogs Head Street in central Ipswich. **BELOW:** A mermaid on the 16th century memorial to Nicholas and Anne Garneys at All Saints Church, Ringsfield.

HE GLIMPSED A WEREWOLF-LIKE MANBEAST COVERED IN FLAMING RED HAIR

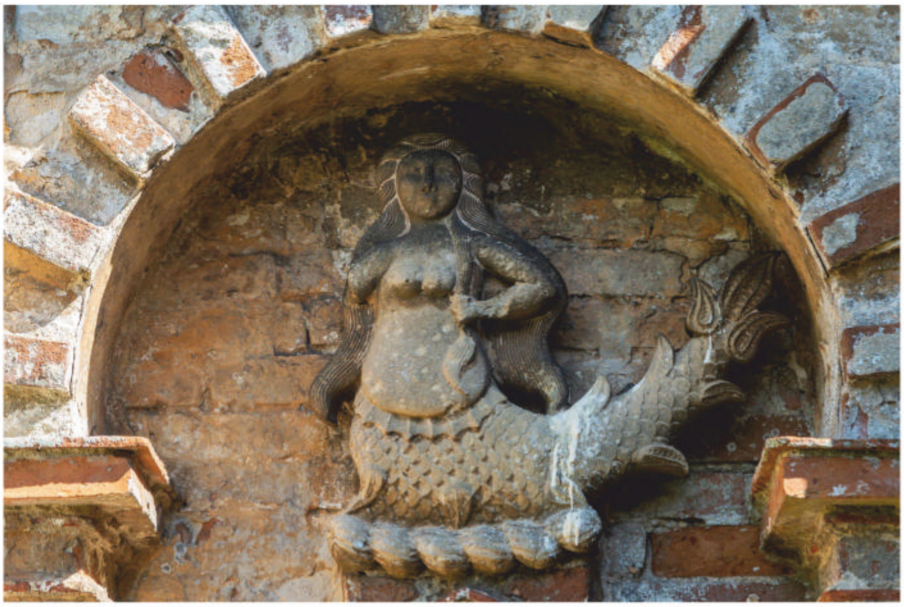
I don't pretend to be an expert on North Norfolk, but the Norfolk seaside resort of Sheringham to this day advertises itself as "twixt sea and pine", with pine forests near the beach. Maps suggest that areas behind the North Norfolk beaches of Horsey, Stalham, Holkham Bay and Hunstanton also have some woodlands.

That's the state of our East of England wooded coastline today, but what about in the 1940s? There may well be some little wooded stretches of the shore that have simply fallen into the sea since then, through coastal erosion. I recall that when I was a child, in the 1970s, there were trees at the top of the cliffs at Dunwich and at Iken Cliff with ropes hanging from their branches for children to swing on, and roots to clamber over, and these are both long gone. The great fallen trees that lie on their sides on the beach at Covehithe are all that remains of what was once a wood at nearby Benacre, lost to coastal erosion and floods in recent times. I invite readers to peruse large-scale 1940s maps of the East of England coast to pinpoint the location of an incident that I find it hard to believe could have happened in the first place.

THE DOG-HEADED MAN OF TUDDENHAM

Tuddenham St Martin, just north of Ipswich, is home to the Magpies, Ipswich's rugby club. Local business Tuddenham Hall Foods is England's biggest asparagus grower. In Tuddenham St Martin, in the 1980s and 1990s, there was "a tradition of sorts" of a local "dog-headed man" that would "seem to be passed down from older brothers and fathers in that area," according to Chris Field, who as a child moved into the village.

Chris told me a friend's dad had "told us a few things" about the dog-headed man, possibly while "trying to put the scares on us." To this day he's unsure as to whether the dog-headed man of Tuddenham was supposed to be "a spirit creature" or something else. He did tell me there were "tales of a man with a wolf's head in the area" and that these were



GEOGPHOTOS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

KATHY WRIGHT / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The beach at Covehithe, with ancient stumps and a distant copse – one possible location for a Kent family's sighting of a werewolf-like beast with red hair.
BELOW: Looking towards Dodds Wood on the Glemham Estate, where one Suffolk informant had a terrifying encounter with something that ran fast and howled loudly.

"linked to certain locations, bridges and river ways." Chris admitted that in the area around Tuddenham, some of the woodlands "do have a certain energy… the feeling like you're being watched, copses that make you feel unwelcome."

These were often the places locally where Tuddenham youths would play "manhunt" or "it", games no doubt made more exciting by the prospect of the dog-headed man lurking behind you in your hiding place! [7]

Something like the dog-headed man of Tuddenham may have wandered 16 miles northeast to terrify two teenage boys. A Suffolk informant (we'll call him "Paul") described being stalked by something one summer night in 1995 while "wild camping". The noises it made while "stomping around", and the sounds of branches breaking on the forest floor, made Paul feel that it that walked on two legs, although he didn't get a look at it.

This incident took place in Dodds Wood, near Sweffling, on the Glemham Estate. "Paul" and a friend spent their teenage years "roughing it" in unofficial campsites. In the summer of 1995, the two friends built one of these camps with a fire pit in Dodds Wood. Paul and friend stayed up most of the night after hearing something walking around the edge of their camp. The "stomping" and "branches breaking" came closer until an hour before dawn", when the noises finally receded.

The boys returned the next night, with Paul's dad's dog. The noises resumed. When the dog "started going berserk and barking like mad… whatever it was… ran off very fast and we could hear the branches breaking as it ran." Days later, during a thunderstorm, Paul heard a "huge howl that went on for more than half a minute," which came from the friends' camp area. [8]

Some of Suffolk's demi-humans were just stories made up to scare kids, others – while obviously 'impossible' – have nonetheless been encountered by sane adults in disturbingly recent times.

NOTES

1 Suffolk Notes & Queries, *Ipswich Journal* 1877, quoted by the Fairy Investigation Society website www.fairyist. com/fairy-places/east-anglian-fairies/mermaid-s-pond-rendlesham-suffolk.

2 *The Book of Days*, W & R Chambers, 1863-64; *Paranormal Suffolk: True Ghost Stories*, Christopher Reeve, Amberley, Stroud 2009.

3 *A Handbook of Bury St Edmunds*, Samuel Tymms, F Lankester, 1859. Alex McWhirter, Heritage Officer for West Suffolk, said his enquiries on the Mermaid's Pits on my behalf had "drawn a blank."

4 Alan Murdie, Ghostwatch, **FT325:18**, March 2015, quoting "Folklore from SE Suffolk", Lady EC Gurdon, *Folklore*, December 1892.

5 *The Folklore of East Anglia*, Enid Porter, BT Batsford, London 1974; https://paranormaldatabase.com/

6 "The Werewolves of Britain" Nick Redfern, *Fate* magazine, March 2006; http://cryptomundo.com/bigfoot-report/ werewolves-uk/

7 Chris Field, telephone interview, 9 Sept 2015. There is a Dog's Head Street in the centre of Ipswich, this apparently has its origin in the pub sign of a mediæval Flemish inn that once stood there.

8 "Paul", Pers. Comm. by email, 30 Sept 2015.

➾ **MATT SALUSBURY** is a regular FT contributor and the author of *Mystery Animals of Suffolk: Including an Account of over 150 Mystery Big Cat Sightings*, from which this artcle is an extract. The book is available via bitternbooks.co.uk and bigcatsofsuffolk.com.

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Curse of the Were-Jackal

MARK GREENER goes beyond lycanthropy with some startling cases of people who believe they transform into animals

Around the middle of the 19th century, a man admitted to a French mental hospital tried to convince doctors that he was a wolf. He pulled his lips apart revealing his "wolf's teeth". He claimed long hair covered his body and that he had cloven feet, and demanded meals of raw meat. Yet he refused the meat offered: it wasn't sufficiently rotten. He wanted to be released and shot in the forest. He died severely malnourished and in agony in the asylum.[1]

Lycanthropy is the best known delusion of transformation into an animal. But zoanthropy encompasses a were-menagerie including dogs, cats, rhinoceroses, frogs, bees, horses, snakes, chickens, gerbils and buffalo.[2] In India, family members brought a 25-year-old milkman to a psychiatric department, saying he washed his hands and genitals excessively, was irritable and sleepless and, for four months, had acted like a buffalo: nodding his head, walking on all fours and asking for hay and grass to eat.

He told psychiatrists that bovine cells had entered his body when he'd had sex with his buffalo "a few times" six months previously, which was why he repeatedly washed his hands and genitals. About two months after his bestiality, he started believing that the bovine cells were changing him into a buffalo, beginning with his lower body. When he looked in a mirror, he saw a buffalo. He sketched his self-image – a minotaur-like bipedal buffalo. Psychiatric drugs helped.

LEFT: A Zimbabwean dancer in traditional mask

FRANS LEMMENS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

> *"More and more do they resemble the animals they portray"*

Psychiatrists consider zoanthropy to be a symptom of mental illness (e.g. psychotic depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or alcohol or drug abuse) or neurological conditions such as epilepsy, dementia or Huntington's disease.[3] But explaining a first-hand account from a highly reliable witness is more difficult.

In 1933, the parapsychologist and psychoanalyst Nandor Fodor received a letter from Gerald Kirkland, a 37-year-old Glamorganshire doctor. The letter recounts Kirkland's experience as a Government Medical Officer in Southern Rhodesia, which he also described during a lecture delivered to the International Institute for Psychical Research in 1935.[4]

One night Kirkland watched men and women collecting "stealthily" and drinking "furiously". Drums beat a "maddening rhythm" that seemed "to come from inside one's head". A circle of drunken men and women danced faster and faster. A hush fell. A witch-doctor danced. "No human, unpossessed, could sustain the terrific strain of that dance," Kirkland said. The witch-doctor fell into a trance. A hunted jackal screamed. A woman whimpered like a female jackal. A growling man mimicked a male jackal. The dancers imitated jackals with "uncanny accuracy" and, Kirkland commented, "one is compelled to believe that they take on the nature, if not the form, of the beast".

The witch-doctor awoke, danced and fell into an even deeper trance. A boy and girl leapt into the circle. Their jackal imitations, Kirkland says, were "miraculous… More and more nearly do they resemble the animals they portray until suddenly, before my eyes, two jackals are standing in that ring. One noses the entranced witch-doctor with canine curiosity. Then they leap off".

So what happened? Very occasionally, people believe that someone else turns into an animal.[5] An 18-year-old Iranian man scalded himself with boiling water. A traditional healer said that the water had hurt the daughter of the King of Jinn, who was out for revenge. The man believed that the Devil sometimes controlled his thoughts or body, he hallucinated drumming sounds and believed cats obeyed his commands. Once he dreamt of vague animal-like creatures. When he awoke, he felt that the air flowing from his nostrils had turned his mother into a wolf. After becoming more restless and agitated, he was admitted to a psychiatric ward. The symptoms disappeared after drug treatment. Unsurprisingly, he does not want to remember his delusion.

A 28-year-old man, also from Iran, took ecstasy to wean him from opium. After the switch, he believed that his father changed into a boar and frequently attacked him. His brother transformed into a horse, which kicked him. His mother metamorphosed into a continuously braying donkey. He reported astral travelling, that an angel protected him, that voices commented on daily activities and that a chicken in his head was taking over his body and filling his brain with thoughts. Again medicines helped.

Psychosis doesn't, however, explain Kirkland's experience. Fodor suggests that "By the time the orgy reached its climax, Dr Kirkland was so overwrought that he may have entered into the psychic atmosphere of the group. The fact that he was unobserved (if he was), would not exempt him from such contagion". At the time, Kirkland blamed a "trick of the sight" caused by fatigue. "But was it?," Kirkland concluded in his talk. "I do not know. Perhaps it was a coincidence that I treated a native girl in the district for severe jackal scratches (an unheard of thing). Perhaps! I am not sure."

Neither am I.

NOTES

1 Blom JD. *History of Psychiatry* 2014;25:87-102

2 Garlipp P *et al. Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 2004;109:19-22; Beckers A *et al. Tijdschr Psychiatr* 2020;62:582-586; Mudgal V *et al. Cureus* 2021;13:e13346

3 Guessoum SB *et al. Frontiers in Psychiatry* 2021;12:718101; Medford N *et al. Frontiers in Psychiatry* 2023;14: DOI:10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1089872

4 Fodor N. *The Journal of American Folklore* 1945;58:310-316; Kirkland G. *Psychic Science* 1935;14:184-195

5 Nejad AG. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 2007;115:159-61; discussion 161; Nasirian M *et al. Addiction and Health* 2009;1:53-6

MARK GREENER is a medical writer and the clinical editor of *Pharmacy Magazine*. He writes regularly for FT.

New Lands and other worlds

One hundred years on from its original publication, should we view Fort's sophomore effort as a "crank book"? **IAN J KIDD** reckons there's far more to it than that.

"My subject is New Lands – things, objects, beings that are, or may be, the data of coming expansions." [1]

Charles Fort's second book appeared in 1923 and was a product of his time in his own new land – Great Britain. He and Anna sailed on the *RMS Olympic*, sister of the *Titanic*, to spend eight years at 39A Marchmont Street near Russell Square. Ten minutes away was the British Museum Reading Room. Fort exulted in its periodicals and newspapers from across Britain and its colonies: the "accessibility and abundance of data".[2] Many of the phenomena carried on themes from *Book of the Damned*. Falls of fish, frogs and other creatures and materials; odd lights seen in the sky or on the Moon. But the years in London offered new material. At one point a sea serpent pops up (a topic in *Lo!*) and there are remarks on psychic phenomena (a topic of *Wild Talents*).

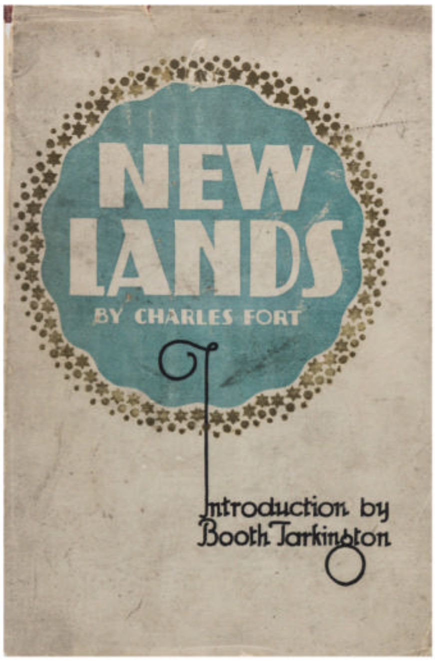
New Lands continued many philosophical themes of *Book of the Damned*. There are the invocations of Exclusionism, the 'underlying nexus' of phenomena and Dogmatic Science. New ideas appear, too, like 'era-intelligence' and an idea of existence as endlessly 'serial'. Existence is conceived to develop, much like an organism. *New Lands* ends evocatively – "Sounds and an interval; sounds and the same interval; sounds again – that there is one integrating organism and that we have heard its pulse." [3] There are barrages of data – 'Sci. Amer., vol. this and p. that' – and Fort's usual funniness and poetic flashes.[4]

So far, so fortean. Data, odd phenomena, 'dogmatic science', and evocative imagery to sustain science fiction for decades to come.[5] Not quite, though. *New Lands* is often judged the least popular of Fort's books. Sales were slow and reviews were mostly tepid.[6] Unlike the other books there are lots of technical details and scientific terminology. In 1924 he sent to Boni & Liveright sample chapters of a sequel – *Skyward Ho!* Fort jokingly hoped it would be rejected and free him up to write romantic stories. Perhaps to his surprise, it was, for his friend Dreiser was not there to force them to accept it.[7] Jokes aside, Fort worried. Writing to Dreiser he describes a period of transition. *The Book of the Damned* "expressed me as a metaphysician", but a "new self" was starting to emerge in *New Lands* and *Skyward Ho!* [8]

Perhaps this new self was too immature, wheeling between different "expressions", as Fort called his speculative theories. Perhaps, but a tough-minded critic will give a blunter explanation: *New Lands* is a crank book.

Fort explained that *New Lands* offered a neo-astronomy and an extra-geography. A whole new cosmology appears – of nearby stars and unknown lands in the sky. Suspicion of crank theorising is secured, for critics, by the stated aim of attacking astronomy. "My desire is not so much to agonize over the single fraudulencies or delusions," says Fort, as to "typify the means by which… Astronomy has established and maintained itself." [9]

As the book goes on, Fort questions the "doctrine of great distances among heavenly bodies" and that of "a moving earth". [10] Failed predictions and the conflicting observations of astronomers are savaged. In another crank red flag, Fort attributes hostility to these new ideas to entrenched dogmatism. A "scientific priestcraft" relies on its arrogant "tyranny of false announcements".[11] By the final chapters there are vessels from other worlds in the sky and at one point a sea serpent pops up. This was too much even for some admirers. As the historian Jeffrey Kripal and Damon Knight – Fort's first biographer – collectively agreed, *New Lands* is "embarrassing".[12]



Fort's wild theories are expressions and not acceptances

Are they right?

Not necessarily. Three aspects of the book should be taken seriously. First: the criticism of 'dogmatism' is not always splenetic. HG Wells snorted at talk of a scientific priestcraft – science is "a continuing exploration".[13] This is a naive philosophy of science. Enquiry will always be structured by tacit constraints. Fort was prescient in appreciating the role of what were later called paradigms. Other criticisms are sophisticated. "Priestcrafts are not merely tyrannies: they're necessities".[14] Developing sciences go through a dialectic of acceptance and resistance. "Temporary exclusions" help immature theories develop until they are able to assimilate disruptive data.[15]

Put into philosophical language, Fort has rejected a model of science based on a search for final, solid foundation. For Descartes, the ideal is for a solid foundation of established, certain facts. Later enquirers then build on it. Fort rejected this on two counts. Solidity and finality are often products of Exclusionism or Dogmatism. Moreover, reality is an immense nexus of fluxing interrelated phenomena. No foundations can be found in this evanescent, quicksilver world. Fort thought of enquiry as an ever-changing web of more-or-less stable beliefs. Whatever integrity it has comes from rich interrelations, not certain foundations. In Exclusionist science, too many interrelations are missed or dismissed – 'damned'. In *New Lands* Fort cites data indicating meteor and earthquake events co-occur. Seismology sees earthquakes and astronomers see meteors, but neither looks at the other's data. Fort did and sensed patterns and relations. Specialisations must be rectified by an "inclusive concept".[16]

Second: Fort has his own terminology. He distinguished expression and acceptance. An acceptance is a claim he endorses. There are few of those in his books. He rarely accepted, and never believed. An expression is an idea or theory – often wild and fantastical – which is speculative. Expressions are experimental. Fort's wild theories are expressions and not acceptances. In *New Lands* Fort 'accepts' the 'flux' of enquiry and the epistemological fact that our interpretations of data are shaped by prejudices and prevailing ideas.[17] The expressions, by con-

trast, are Fort's speculations about what his data might mean. Examples: objects in the sky could be vessels from other worlds; during eclipses and other celestial events lunarians try to communicate with Earthlings; "extra-mundarian" creatures are of many different kinds, some capable of adapting to terrestrial environments.[18] Fort's terminology features in all four books. It acts as a guide to readers. A true crank would not be so self-conscious.

A third aspect of *New Lands* concerns the different targets. Critics focus on the strange 'neo-astronomy' claims – the stars are much nearer than is supposed and (as in Aristotle's cosmology) fixed in a rotating shell. Fort was using these 'expressions' to attack aspects of astronomy that rankled him, like its inflated claims of predictive accuracy and propensity to triumphalism. Those chapters are full of an earnest appeal for humility – for tentativeness in theorising and modesty in communication (the best cases are part one, chapters 4 and 6). Fort clearly hated arrogance and dogmatism. *New Lands* attacks systems of Exclusionism with "dogmas for walls" and in whose "frozen textbooks" is inscribed 'Thou shalt not!' [19]

Matters are different with the book's other theme: "extra-geography" (Fort loved prefixes and hyphens). Extra-geography is an umbrella term for ideas about intelligent life, originating beyond Earth. Fort's speculations include staples of subsequent science fiction and ufology. There may be "beings and objects" which visit Earth from "outer space". Some of the vessels of these "space-travellers" may be signalling one another, or trying to attract the attention of Earthlings. Sometimes the extra-mundanians may "seize" humans for reasons unknown.[20]

Fort was fascinated by the prospect of communications from other worlds. The subject was also topical in the 1920s. Fort quotes Tesla's claims about receiving signals attributed to a Martian civilisation. It was unclear if there is life elsewhere in the Solar System or beyond (it still is). Fort, though, was not into radio or astronomical observation. He searched data and noticed patterns. Data suggested that vessels have been seen - maybe manœuvring or searching for something. The explanations offered are often strained or uncompelling.[21] But Fort never says they are extraterrestrials and expresses no certainty about their nature or purposes.

When engaged in extra-geography, Fort's aim was not to attack Exclusionist tendencies in science. It was to assemble data, point out relations and offer alternative possibilities. If so, we could come to a softer reading of *New Lands*. 'Neo-astronomy' reflects Fort's ire at the overconfidence of astronomers. He didn't really think the stars are extremely near. This is expression not acceptance. Likewise in the case of 'extra-geography'. Fort is speculating about alternative interpretations of odd aerial phenomena. Speculation and imagination are different things from assertion. Perhaps some rhetoric in *New Lands* is splenetic. Perhaps Fort should have taken longer to digest this London data or resolve that tension between the metaphysician and his emerging 'selves'.

Is this sympathetic interpretation of *New Lands* right? Not quite. Something important is missing: the other accounts of Fort's views at the time as seen in his letters to newspapers concerning extra-terrestrial relations with the Earth.

Fort started writing letters to newspapers on the theme of "visitors" and messages from other worlds about 1924. I have over 70 in my files. The letters start by quoting data about mysterious sightings or falls, suggest the idea they originate from 'other worlds', and finish with appeals for further data. All the letters I know of are from anglophone newspapers in the US and Great Britain and its colonies.[22]

Consider a letter – or, rather, two – that appeared in the *Chattanooga Daily Times* in 1924. Fort's cover letter to the editor insists, politely, that his ideas are not "preposterous". It adds that, with the upcoming opposition of Mars, Fort's "speculation upon other worlds" is also timely. The letter to readers is typical Fort – data from periodicals and newspapers, refutations of the conventional explanations and appeals for more data. In this case, Fort's interest was "observations upon an unknown vessel in the sky" of Tennessee and Alabama in January 1910. At the end of the letter Fort mentions gathering material for "as extensive an investigation of this whole subject as is possible". Most of the 1920s letters are of this kind. Even letters on other phenomena track the "other worlds" theme. A letter in *TP's and Cassell's Weekly* concerns a "revolving wheel of light" in the Indian Ocean. Fort says: "I am not convinced that the phenomenon is of marine origin." Another letter on odd marine animals to an Australian paper does the same – "monsters" in the sea which, maybe, actually originate in "undiscovered" lands. This 1920s correspondence indicates Fort took seriously the possibility of visitations, transportations, and communications from other worlds.

Several expressions are offered. Meteors and artificial projectiles are fired to the Earth that seem to bear messages. Materials and creatures may be mistakenly "transported" to our skies or seas. "Ships" visit our skies while their pilots sometimes come to the surface. In some cases, their oddities are interpreted by demonologists and psychical researchers. As Fort suggests, "beings and objects … visited this Earth, not from a spiritual existence, but from outer space".[23] The tone of these letters is sincere and earnest. Fort explains to one of his correspondents being deeply impressed by the *New Lands* data – "I am putting in all my time, trying to spread the idea." [24]

Fort's suggested book on extra-terrestrials did not manifest. *Lo!* and *Wild Talents* searched different kinds of data and went in their own directions. They also reverted to Fort's ethos of non-committal speculation: "I offer the data. Suit yourself." [25] Perhaps the 'self' at work in *New Lands* and the 1920s was too committal: too enticed by the prospect of 'other worlds', too frustrated with an astronomic science too dogmatic to seek them out. Alarmed by these certitudes, Fort retreated back into a playful, probing outlook. Odd falls were attributed to teleportation not unknown aerial lands. The idea of intervention into earthly life that first appeared in the lost manuscripts *X* and *Y* was translated into the metaphysical speculations on Dominants, Development, "orthogenesis", and "era-intelligence".[26]

In a poignant interview after Fort's death, Anna described their London life. After days of data and letter-writing and evening walks, Fort would open the windows and gaze at the stars. This, said Anna, "was his delight for a long, long time".[27] I wonder if what delighted him was hope.

NOTES

1 Charles Fort, *New Lands*, part 2, chapter 14 (*NL*, 2.14).

2 *NL*, 2.18.

3 *NL*, 2.25.

4 *NL*, 1.1

5 Tanner F Boyle, *The Fortean Influence on Science Fiction: Charles Fort and the Evolution of the Genre* (McFarland & Company, 2020).

6 On the reception of *New Lands*, see Ulrich Magin, "This Island Earth: New Lands at 100", **FT436:42-46** and Jim Steinmeyer, *Charles Fort: The Man Who Invented the Supernatural*, ch.14.

7 Fort to De Casseres in Steinmeyer p.222

8 Charles Fort, "November 6th 1929" memoir.

9 *NL*, 1.2.

10 *NL*, 2.13.

11 *NL*, 1.2.

12 Jeffrey Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, p.129.

13 Wells to Dreiser in Thomas P Riggio (ed.) *Theodore Dreiser: American Diaries 1902-1926*, vol. 2, pp.531-533.

14 *NL*, 1.4.

15 *NL*, 2.14; 1.15.

16 *NL*, 2.12.

17 *NL*, 1.6; 2.15.

18 *NL*, 2.16, 2.20, 2.22.

19 *NL*, 1.1. See my "Dogmatism be damned!", **FT399:54-55**.

20 *NL*, 2.6, 2.17, 2.24.

21 *NL*, 2.23.

22 I have written up some of these letters in **FT374:54-55** and **361:54-55**.

23 *NL*, 2.6.

24 Letter to AL Smith, 22 June 1926, published online by John D Stanton at https://johndstanton.blogspot.com.

25 *Lo!*, part 1, chapter 4.

26 On *X* and *Y*, see Steinmeyer, ch.10.

27 Dreiser's interview with Anna.

IAN J KIDD is an associate professor at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Nottingham and has a longstanding interest in Charles Fort's life and work. He is a regular contributor to FT.

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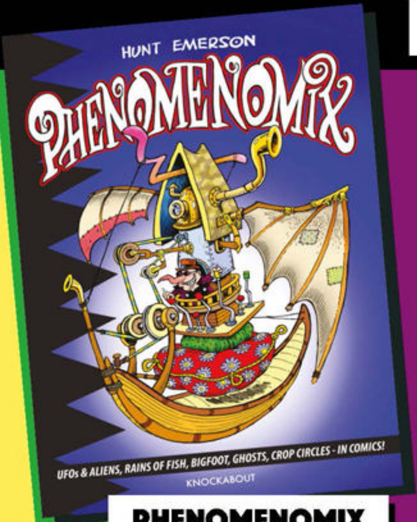
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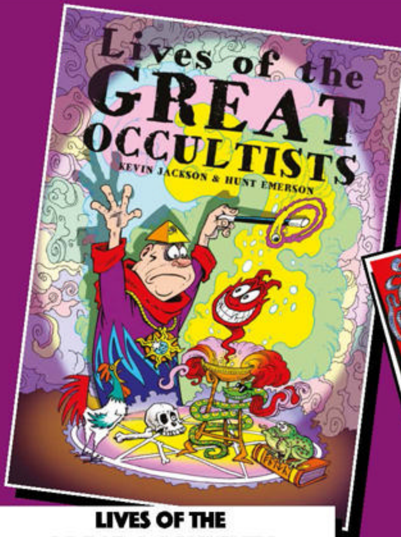
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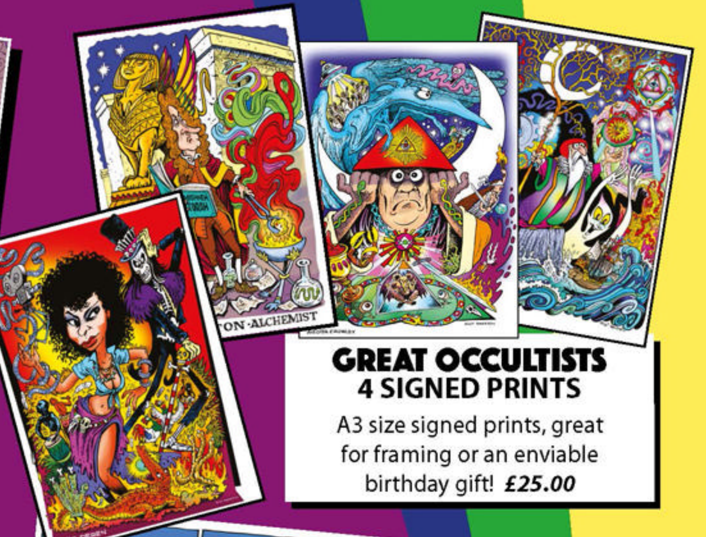
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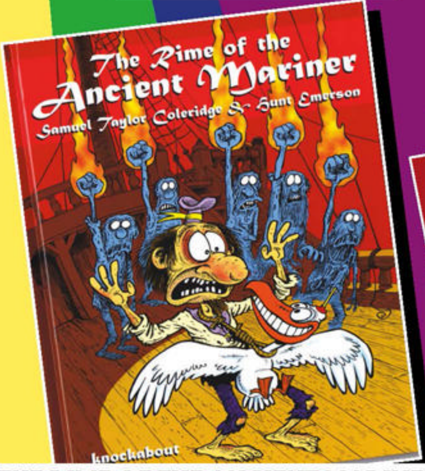
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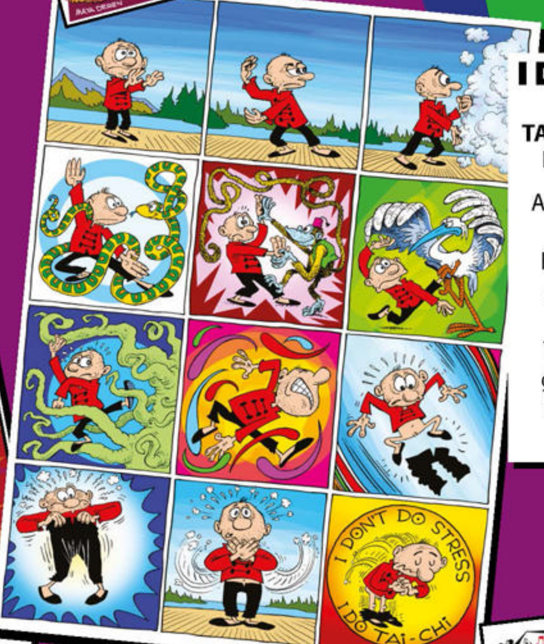
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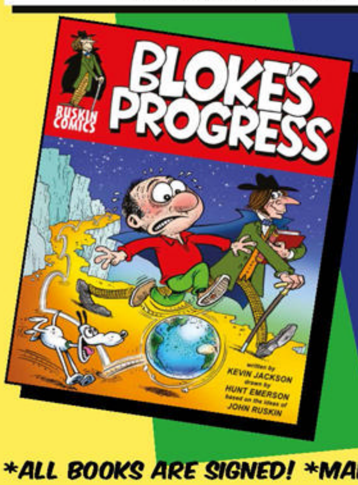
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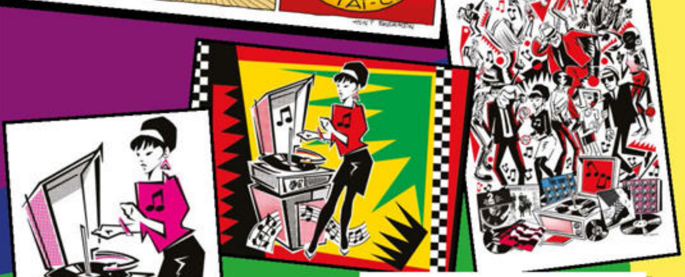

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Appreciating esoteric symbolism

Paula Dempsey examines a new critical introduction to Tarot, an expensive but beautiful new Taschen box on the Rider Waite Smith Tarot, and a Lovecraft-inspired deck

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Simon Kenny

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Necronomicon Tarot

Titan Books 2023

78 cards plus guide, £24.99, ISBN 9781803367217

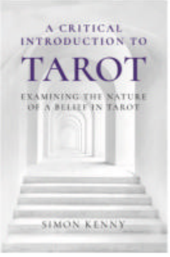
The most sceptical fortean may take an interest in esoterica, if only in why people believe in it. Here are three very different tarot-related offerings.

Simon Kenny's book isn't the "how to" guide that the title suggests. Rather than the various meanings of the suits and cards he poses more fundamental questions. Does tarot work? If it does, how? What are its uses? The book is illustrated throughout with the Rider Waite Smith (RWS) tarot deck, of which more later.

The introduction gets the history and a typical card spread out of the way early on, before moving on to something far more interesting; the adoption of tarot by feminists and the LGBTQAI+ community has led to the creation of new decks which reform or reject the heteronormative imagery of traditional cards and the binary nature of much tarot imagery, the Emperor and Empress, for example, or The Lovers. Kenny traces this binary back to Pythagoras and a human tendency to categorise everything by opposites: male/female, dark/light, good/evil.

Subsequent chapters examine the connection tarot has with various magical systems including the Kabbalah, Jung's mysticism, Satanism, Witchcraft and Freemasonry. There are many digressions, all for good reason, proposing frameworks for using tarot in magical practice and personal reflection.

Multiple perspectives on how the cards work don't help to answer how and why the cards work, however. More practically, the book needs a decent index. It does provide a refreshingly innovative perspective on tarot and would be of value to tarot readers who wish to extend their understanding and practice, or those with a wider interest in symbolism and magic.


A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO
TAROT
EXAMINING THE NATURE OF A BELIEF IN TAROT
SIMON KENNY

Taschen has produced a beautiful celebration of probably the most popular tarot deck. Originally produced in the 1900s and simply called *The Tarot*, it is now known by the names of its publisher, Rider, its illustrator, Pamela Colman Smith, and her fellow Golden Dawn member AE Waite. Waite, who oversaw the creation of the deck, wrote *The Guide to the Tarot* produced in facsimile in this boxed set, together with a reprint of the deck, both from the 1910 printing and accompanied by a lavishly-illustrated 400-page book.

> *We must be careful not to drown the metaphysical baby in the postmodern bathwater*

Essays from the late Rachel Pollack, Mary J Greer and Johannes Fiebig provide potted biographies of Waite and Smith as well as the story of the deck's creation and continuing popularity. Smith's inspiration to use pictures on all 78 cards, rather than an abstract design on the minor trumps, may have come from the 15th-century Sola-Busca deck, exhibited at the British Museum in 1907. Her talent as an illustrator and set designer brings a depth to the cards that is highlighted in the largest section of the book, on interpretation. A list of meanings is given for each card and the cards of the minor arcana are linked with others of the same number in the other suits and with the corresponding number in the major arcana.

The book is not without flaws, however. The English translation of the introduction needs some editing and there are odd assertions: for example, that the number 13 is unlucky in the West because the 12-month Christian calendar supplanted the 13-month Celtic one. Evidence, please! As with Kenny's book, an invitation to make your own interpretations of the cards, if taken to its logical conclusion, makes the majority of the book redundant. We must be careful not to drown the metaphysical baby in the postmodern bathwater.

Waite's own manual on the tarot is, on the other hand, almost perfect. He provides a brief history of the cards and strong opinions about which of his occult predecessors is talking nonsense and why, then resolves various older meanings for the cards into a simple system of interpretation, all in less than 200 tiny pages. Waite provides the basics, while Smith's illustrations allow the reader to dive as deeply into the many layers of symbolism as they wish.

The RWS deck symbolism has been reinterpreted in hundreds of other decks, overlaid with themes as diverse, and more or less serious, as Alice in Wonderland, Robin Hood and pandas.

The *Necronomicon Tarot* is one such spawn. Lovecraft's cosmic horror is all about the unknowable, so it's an odd theme for an oracle. The major arcana has been adapted to fit Lovecraft's vision; think Madness rather than The Moon and Aliens rather than The Lovers. Three of the traditional four suits of the minor arcana have changed: Books instead of Swords, Torches for Wands and Beakers for Cups.

The minors have a nice story theme running through them. The imagery sticks with HPL and steers clear of the Derleth family tree for the Mythos. There are suggested spreads to aid in exploring your fears.

Necronomicon
TAROT DECK & GUIDEBOOK

A nice-looking deck, recommended for Lovecraft fans and chaos magicians.

Kenny ★★★

Fiebig ★★★★

Necronomicon Tarot ★★★★

Excluded women?

Barry Baldwin dismisses an axe-grinding book which has far too many omissions

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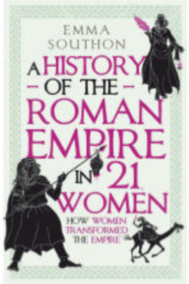
Oneworld Publications 2023

Hb, 416pp, £18.99, ISBN 9780861542307

This book is both pot-boiled from the author's previous books and an outdated feminist moan about the exclusion of women from male-written histories of Rome. Southon (who quit Academe, dubbing it "grim") kicks off by lambasting an unnamed professor who deprecated Womens' Studies as no better than those of Dogs. Well, there was such a time. But now long gone. Men have been writing about ancient women for decades. Three conspicuous examples: Charles Seltman, *Women in Antiquity*, 1954; Stewart Perowne, *The Caesars' Wives: Above Suspicion?*, 1974; JPVD Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits*, 1962. All of these are omitted from a somewhat unscrupulous bibliography, as are (eg) Vassiliki Panoussi's *Brides, Mourners, Bacchae: Women's Rituals in Roman Literature* (2019) and Ann R Raia's online "Being Female in Ancient Rome: Gender and Class Matters" (2012).


EMMA SOUTHON
A HISTORY OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN 21 WOMEN
HOW WOMEN TRANSFORMED THE EMPIRE

Naturally, she cannot overlook multiple contributions by the inevitable Mary Beard. However, her much dust-jacket-touted business women and sex workers have been fully recognised and catalogued with translated primary sources by Mary R Lefkowitz & Maureen B Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (1982), another notable omission.

Southon chooses a team of 21 women, providing biographies. She makes the point that the earliest females in Roman history, the Sabine Hersilia and Etruscan prophetess Tanaquil (both widely regarded as mythological) were not Roman. Same applies to later Queen Zenobia (the genuine article). So, why no Cleopatra? Perhaps dismissed as too familiar? Another strange surprise is the complete absence of Roman empresses, especially as Southon's first book was a biography of Claudius's fourth wife and Nero's mother Agrippina. Julia Mamma and Julia Maesa get in, but they were basically quasi-Camilla Queen Consorts. As to late antiquity, she misses an open goal by leaving out the mathematician-philosopher-martyr Hypatia.

Still, Augustus's daughter Julia (famous for her jokes) and the poetess Julia Balbilla were good choices, as are Perpetua and Melania as voices of the new Christian presence in pagan Rome.

The book is written in lowest common denominator demotic (albeit mercifully jargon-free), with, for example, the historians Livy and Dionysus of Halicarnassus as "two blokes", Romulus with other Roman men as "bloody awful, but then they all were", a Roman general is "a posh bastard", while Sabina's poetry is "pretty fucking thrilling stuff".

There is nothing new for professional ancient historians in this remorselessly axe-grinding book. Lay readers and newcomers will, though, get a briskly written and often very funny survey of Roman women, laced with many free-wheeling modern analogues such as "Leather-face" and Beyoncé.

Look out for the forthcoming book on this same subject by one of the brightest stars in Britain's classical firmament, Daisy Dunn.

★★

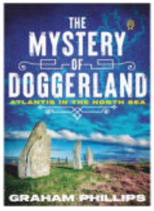
The Mystery of Doggerland

Atlantis in the North Sea

Graham Phillips

Bear and Co 2023

Pb, 224pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781591434238



Are similarities between the designs on Fair Isle jumpers and patterns seen in Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery and on large carved stones in the Boyne Valley proof of the persistence of a folk memory from the pre-"Megalithic Age"? A question surprisingly not asked by this book for it appears that Fair Isle is the last remaining fragment of Northland – itself the cradle of civilisation (yes, yet another). The isle is also a last remnant in the book, only really appearing, anticlimactically, in the final dozen pages. Despite being in the title, Doggerland (generally accepted to be further south in the North Sea) takes an early bath and is lightly mentioned, nor is its relationship to Northland really explored.

The book is rather a reworking of modern-day existentialist worries, most notably sea-level rising, mega-tsunamis/volcanic eruptions and thawed-out pandemics (not yet, however, AI or asteroid strikes), dredged up as warnings from the past.

As is standard in "alternative" archæology books, much of the discussion is based on secondary sources and is so simplistic that it has become inaccurate/sub-accurate. The author's use of "Megalithic Culture", a term that is strenuously avoided by mainstream prehistorians as being misleading/meaningless or rather having a Humpty Dumpty meaning, is a leading example as is his use of latest scientific thinking.

Graham Phillips, whilst tripping down well-worn ley-line paths, has knitted together a fabric that is surprisingly and disappointingly bland. This is a tepid place-holder cum pot-boiler, with much winter cladding, and is padded out with unnecessary pages of descriptions of archæological sites from the Yucatan to the Orkneys, all rather sounding like pages taken from official guide books. Whilst elsewhere some of his central tenets (herb-picking by moonlight for maximum strength) are repeats having been expounded at length in his recent book *Wisdom Keepers of Stonehenge*.

But there are a couple of positives: there are 25 very well-composed colour plates of the usual British Isles megalithic super-sites (Wayland's Smithy is missing); and early chapters dissect both earlier vanished lands/supercontinents and their Victorian/Edwardian protagonists. Chapter two, essentially about the rise of urbanisation, is all about Atlantis; but it is chapter three that is perhaps the most interesting, about lost continents and their doomed world-seeding ur-civilisations, namely Pacific Mu and Indian Ocean Lemuria.

Against expectations, Phillips, in good journalistic mode, dismantles all aspects of these conceits showing the false premises supporting them plus providing the abundant archæological and geological reasons that prove them to be silly. This is an exemplary case of poacher turned gamekeeper and to be roundly applauded.

Ironically, should the same reasoning be applied to Phillips's Northland it can only achieve the same result. The book is a quick-read, hand-me-down, modern existentialist worry-list bandwagon-jumper, knitted from faded/well-worn old patterns.

Rob Ixer

★★

Living with the Dead

How We Care for the Deceased

Vibeke Marie Viestad & Andreas Viestad, tr. Matt Bagguley

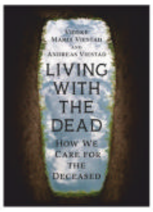
Reaktion Books 2023

Hb, 240pp, £16, ISBN 9781789147681

Death may be one of the few human universals, but human responses to loss are far from uniform. In *Living with the Dead*, Vibeke Marie Viestad and her husband Andreas explore some of the different ways in which human societies have dealt with death, grief and commemoration, from the seemingly-orderly edge-of-town cemeteries of 19th-century Europe to the fantastical, custom-

ised coffins of Ghana or modern practices such as fusing a dead loved one's ashes into a diamond.

Living with the Dead combines personal experience, accounts of travel, interviews with archæologists and funerary specialists, and more, creating an introduction to the vast variety of human cultural responses to death. Each section looks at a particular aspect of dealing with the dead, with chapters on cremation, dividing bodies into parts, transforming bodies into jewellery, the technical challenges of managing decomposition, constructing funeral monuments and more.



Within each chapter, the authors draw on examples from cultures around the world to illustrate the different ways humans have approached these issues.

Even when dealing with practices that might seem gruesome to Western audiences, such as the traditional Zoroastrian practice of allowing birds to scavenge human remains, the Tibetan custom of "body-breaking", or the obligation of male relatives to suck out the deceased's bone marrow in the Trobriand Islands, the Viestads avoid gawking. Instead, each of these customs serves as an illustration of the wide variety of human responses to death, approached with curiosity and empathy.

Living with the Dead isn't an exhaustive history or analysis of human funerary practice, and isn't meant to be. It reads more like a collection of magazine articles on related topics. It's easy to imagine it as a series of 30-minute episodes of a television series about funerary customs: informative and thought-provoking, but more interested in using variety as a way to illustrate its themes than exploring them for their own sake. This does mean that the book runs the risk of being less satisfying to readers who already have some in-depth knowledge of fun-erary practice. If you've already studied the history of European urban cemeteries, the Viestads' brief summary isn't going to tell you much you don't already know. But the other consequence of this broad approach is that even readers with extensive knowledge of one area of the field will still find something new in the book.

Engaging, informative and sometimes humorous, *Living with the Dead* is an accessible and entertaining look not only at the many and diverse funerary rites of the world but also at the larger issues that underlie them: an intelligently human introduction to one of the most complex aspects of human society.

James Holloway

★★★★★

On Disinformation

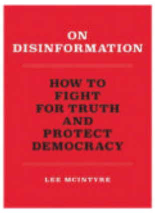
How to fight for truth and protect democracy

Lee McIntyre

MIT Press 2023

Pb, 144pp, £13.99, ISBN 9780262546300

This short (24,000 words) book is mostly about what philosopher Lee McIntyre calls denialism – how powerful groups persuade people to deny political and scientific truth.



He dates this back to 1953 and the gathering of tobacco manufacturers to consider what to do about the research linking smoking to cancer. Answer? Fight the science. He sees "a straight line between the manufacture of doubt about whether cigarettes cause lung cancer and today's conspiracy-fueled dumpster fire of disbelief about any facts that conflict with one's political agenda ... What began with a few tobacco executives at the Plaza Hotel culminated 70 years later on the steps of the US Capitol ... a tide of money ... [is] doing for election denial what the tobacco and fossil fuel industries did for science denial."

This is possible because our beliefs are not based on facts; they are rooted in identity. Most of us believe what our group believes. "Hundreds of experiments have been performed by social psychologists over the last 70 years that demonstrate the social nature of belief."

His second theme, of course, is the Internet and especially social media with its "automated algorithms ... formulated to maximise engagement, clicks, and time spent on the site. Rather than promote truth, they are engineered for profit." The solution is obvious but politically impossible.

The first thing would be to reinstate the "fairness doctrine". Before 1987, the Federal Communications Commission's rules required the holders of broadcast licenses both to present controversial issues of public importance and to do so in a manner that fairly reflected differing viewpoints. After the doctrine was scrapped by President Reagan, America had the rise of the radio "shock jocks", notably Rush Limbaugh, and then Fox TV, who could say anything. Into that legislative vacuum came the Internet.

The second thing would be to remove the legal immunity of website platforms so they could be sued for the content they broadcast. But neither is politically practical. The Internet owners are so rich, any attempt at either of these would drown in a torrent of hostile political spending. So neither of the parties in the US will contemplate it. They – and to a lesser extent we – are stuck.

Nicely written, witty and impassioned, this was a pleasure to read. I would have given it five stars but for the fact that McIntyre omits entirely the (surely relevant) fact that nearly half the US population thinks the Bible is the literal truth. It's not that big a step from there to belief in the existence of Jewish space lasers.

Robin Ramsay

★★★★

Eleanor of Aquitaine, as It Was Said

Truth and Tales about the Mediæval Queen

Karen Sullivan

University of Chicago Press 2023

Hb, 270pp, £36, ISBN 9780226825830

Prof Karen Sullivan takes an unusual approach in this study of the life of Eleanor of Aquitaine: as well as the known factual history she focuses heavily on what various informal chroniclers and writers of romances have said about her over the centuries – "it is said [*ut dicitur*]" – i.e. how Eleanor was perceived as well as the straight facts. This seems a very fortean approach, akin in some ways to how we examine reports of alien abductions, ghosts and other phenomena. Unfortunately it doesn't work out that way.

The book is unremittingly negative throughout. Whether discussing Eleanor's first marriage to Louis VII of France ("she said that she had married a monk, not a king"), or her supposed affairs with everyone from her uncle Raymond of Antioch to Geoffrey Plantagenet, the father of her second husband Henry II of England, to the Saracen leader Saladin, she focuses almost entirely on scurrilous reports, even when they're clearly nonsense. Saladin was just 10 or 11 when she was on the Second Crusade and supposed to have had an adulterous relationship with him; despite that, Sullivan spends eight pages on the story.

This imbalance continues throughout the book: her relations with Henry II and with their sons, her influence on troubadours (apparently non-existent, according to Sullivan), her entering the monastery at Fontevraud in her old age – all are presented as self-serving acts unbecoming of a woman, a wife or a queen.

There's no doubt that the book is scholarly; there are 53 pages of notes, and the author frequently (but often pointlessly) gives the Latin or French or Occitan source words in brackets, so: "Contrary to regal dignity [*regiam dignitatum*], she neglected her marital vows…". But her writing is incredibly repetitious in places, which makes it something of a dull read, something I never thought I'd say of a biography of Eleanor. The complete lack of any illustrations compounds the dullness. Literally on the very last page of the text she quotes Matthew Parris on "the noble Queen Eleanor, an admirable lady of beauty and astuteness", and mentions sources that "stress her liberality, her intelligence and her energy". The entire page is full of positive references and praise for Eleanor – which only serves to point up the gross imbalance of the previous 200+ pages.

Eleanor of Aquitaine
AS IT WAS SAID
KAREN SULLIVAN

An interesting semi-fortean approach – but so poorly done.

David V Barrett

★★

Haunted soundscapes

Gordon Rutter enjoys this latest exploration of the wyrd, folk horror and hauntology in films, TV, music and books

A Year in The Country: Lost Transmissions

Dystopic Visions, Alternate Realities, Paranormal Quests and Exploratory Electronica

Stephen Prince

A Year in The Country 2023
Pb, 237pp, £14.94, ISBN 9781916095274

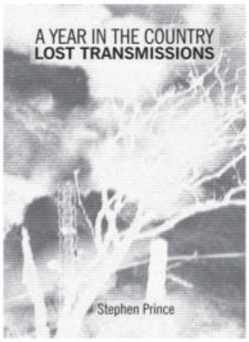
A Year in The Country is a project and not just a series of books. A website with over 1,200 entries (ayearinthecountry.co.uk), music and book releases, all curated by Stephen Prince, have been on the go since 2014. This current volume is the fourth non-fiction book and it is in the company of two novellas, one artwork book, six associated albums or EPs, the website and various Spotify (and other streaming services) playlists – all by Stephen Prince.

To quote from the website, the aims of the project are "explorations of wyrd or otherly pastoralism; the flipside of bucolic dreams; the further reaches of folk music and rural culture; work that draws inspiration from the underlying tales of the land; and where such things meet and intertwine with the lost futures, spectral histories and parallel worlds of what has become to be known as hauntology". If you're not sure of what hauntology is then the current volume handily gives you a seven-and-a-half page definition. If you are more familiar with the Folk Horror Revival ideas of Andy Paciorek then you are in the right ball park. If you grew up during the latter part of the Cold War you will recognise the influences.

The Lost Transmissions entry to the canon takes in haunted soundscapes of electronica, cinema and television's fascination with various forms of dystopia and the general prevalence of the occult in 1970s Great Britain.

The book is wide-ranging in its 16 chapters and it contains for me (and I suspect many readers of FT) aspects of the intimately familiar, sections in the "I've heard of that" category and also much new material of a similar vein (or to put this last statement another way – new music, books, films and TV to track down and enjoy).

The first chapter looks at the BBC TV show *Leap in the Dark*, broadcast between 1973 and 1980: four series (24 episodes in total) ranging from documentary through to re-enactments and pure drama. Various parts were presented by Colin Wilson or written by Alan Garner and not all of the episodes are present in the archives of the BBC. Prince tries to piece together the content of some episodes from *Radio Times* listings and contemporary newspaper reports. He seems to be unaware of the existence of the BBC Script Library where researchers can consult scripts of many long-passed shows. And in fact some of the episodes he tries to piece together are readily available on Youtube.



One thing missing from the book is illustrations. Chapter two looks at the twisted reality of Polish film posters. Fortunately these can easily be found online and I would urge you to seek them out as you read this chapter.

Musically, names such as Boards of Canada, Delia Derbyshire (most well known for her arrangement of the *Dr Who* theme music, an incredible talent), Ghost Box, Paul Weller and the Delia Derbyshire Appreciation Society are covered extensively.

For the visual side of things Nigel Kneale and *Sapphire and Steel* get a look in as well for the familiar aspects, along with often overlooked films such as the 1975 *Rollerball* and 1997's *Gattaca*.

As there are many auditory and visual delights mentioned there are frequent references to their availability. For some there is currently no chance of getting them, or if they can be found they have a prohibitive price. The podcasts are easy to find and for some of the films in particular it is worth a quick search online. The entire film may not be found but enough clips will most likely be viewable to give a flavour of the atmosphere being invoked. And just occasionally some of the niche TV channels may even show them.

But there is one thing missing in this entire book. Writers and directors of films are mentioned, but not actors. This seems a strange omission, as think of the many ordinary films that have been transformed by the otherworldly performance of an actor.

This is a book full of the starts of journeys for the reader. I defy anyone to read it and not mentally note something to pursue as a follow up. There is an easy route available – the appendix features a *Desert Island Discs*-style list of 52 tracks that acted as "signposts, touchstones, significant markers and discoveries for *A Year in The Country*". Sadly not yet a Spotify list on the website.

Overall, this is an overarching work full of a wealth of essays on source material to be enjoyed on nights when the weather is grim – a good storm outside might be best!

I'll even forgive Stephen Prince two aspects of his book. Firstly some of his sentences can be a little on the long side – one runs to over half a page. And secondly, and perhaps more importantly, his mistake of calling Glasgow the capital of Scotland as opposed to my current residence of Edinburgh!

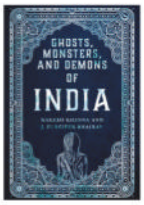
★★★★★

Ghosts, Monsters and Demons of India

Rakesh Khanna & J Furcifer Bhairav

Watkins/Blaft 2023
Hb, 417pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781786788078

This is a reprint of the 2020 edit- by the authors' own company in India; Watkins is to be thanked for bringing it to a wider Western market. It provides individual descriptions of 330 of the regional ghosts, monsters and demons of India. These portraits range from half a page to several pages long; all so well-written and fascinating in their unfamiliar details that one is compelled to keep reading. Khanna's publishing house specialises in Indian-language folklore and pulp novels; we should be grateful that his scholarly love of local lore found another expression. His pseudonymous co-author, clearly another scholar, claims to be "the child of a professional exorcist".



Every entry comes across with all the delight of a new discovery to be told to friends, and all the more fascinating for bringing to life the dark side of rural demonology and witchcraft that is quite foreign to most of us. While ghosts, demons, goblins, spirits, vampires, nightmares, fairies, cannibals, revenants and animated curses are common to Western lore, their Indian equivalents emerge from such ancient Sanskrit poems as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Although parts of these epics can be dated back to the 8th century BC, this astonishingly varied and richly detailed material is living folklore for modern Indians.

Bucolic folklore of the Indian continent is not so well represented in the general literature, and scholarly studies are not easily accessible outside institutional publishing, so this anthology is doubly welcome. Despite the obscure nature of their stories the authors' enthusiasm ensures this handsome presentation will delight the general reader. To add to its value, the book is richly illustrated with monochrome drawings. No index, but the list of names and copious bibliography offer some compensation.

Bob Rickard

★★★★★

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

DAVID V BARRETT ROUNDS UP THE LATEST TITLES FROM THE WORLD OF SPECULATIVE AND FANTASTIC FICTION

Him

Geoff Ryman

Angry Robot/Watkins 2023
Pb, 366pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781915202673

A young woman, Maryam, becomes pregnant in an unusual way: "I didn't do anything." She's hurriedly married off to a troublesome preacher, Yosef, who is exiled from Yerusalam to the obscure northern village of Nazareth to live in dusty poverty. Maryam names her daughter Avigayil – but four or five years later the child insists: "My name now is Yehushua… I'm a boy." Over the years, Yehush hangs out with boys in the village and becomes an apprentice to the tekton, the local builder. At 12, already showing significant spiritual awareness, Yehush confounds the priests and scholars at the temple in Yerusalam in a beautifully-written scene. Life goes on, Maryam has six more children, and Yehush grows into a somewhat difficult adult, whose preaching draws many followers – but ultimately we know how it will end. *Him* is Geoff Ryman's first novel in 18 years, and is a triumph. Most of the story is told from Maryam's troubled viewpoint – I'd imagine devout Catholics will be appalled – and yet somehow Ryman renders the well-known story, and its characters, new and utterly real and believable. The people of Nazareth even sound Northern!

HIM
GEOFF RYMAN

Dead Monkey Rum

Robert Guffey

Planet Bizarro Press 2023
Pb, 178pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781915546005

A monkey who drives a '57 Chevy, smokes cigars, swears like a trooper, drinks in an LA beach bar and chats up (human) barmaids – this has to be one of the strangest beginnings to a novel. And it only gets crazier as the story unfolds. The monkey is involved in some very dodgy deals, one of which results in him (with a feisty barmaid) being pursued by huge semi-human thugs intent on retrieving a Tiki idol. It ends up with an astonishing supernatural climax on Easter Island. Sometime FT contributor Robert Guffey's *Dead Monkey Rum* is one of the weirdest romps you'll ever read, which along the way explores some serious moral issues.

Saturnalia

Stephanie Feldman

Verve Books 2023
Pb, 238pp, £9.99, ISBN 9780857308399

Stephanie Feldman's *Saturnalia* is about Philadelphia with a difference, and an exclusive fraternity/sorority house with a difference. Nina left the ultra-elite Saturn Club three years ago, largely because of toxic relationships; now her only friend from that time has invited her back for Saturnalia – and offers her a wodge of cash if she'll steal a small package for him. When she does, reawakening a lot of uncomfortable memories of the Saturn Club and former friends and lovers along the way, her curiosity gets the better of her and she takes a look inside, and finds an astonishing occult creation. Much of the book is about her fleeing a mysterious and very deadly hunter, leaving a trail of bodies in her wake, and discovering by the end who she can, and more crucially who she can't, trust. A very dark, often painful and sometimes brutal novel, which draws you along with Nina every step of the way.

High Vaultage

Chris and Jen Sugden

Gollancz 2024
Hb, 384pp, £22, ISBN 9781399604161

High Vaultage is a sort-of steampunk Victorian detective novel. It's 1887, Queen Victoria has more mechanical parts than human, and London has expanded to cover the entire southern half of England. At its heart is a massive tower which supplies unlimited power – but at the cost of plunging the Thames into a permanent frozen winter. Brunelian engineers seem to run the city, tearing down entire neighbourhoods almost at random for new building projects. Journalist Clara Entwistle teams up with ex-Detective Inspector Archibald Fleet, himself partly mechanical, as private investigators. Most of their cases seem trivial, until they discover a connection between them and a series of bank robberies which have the police and the press puzzled. The plot is convoluted and on the whole successful – but the book would have worked far better if husband-and-wife authors Chris and Jen Sugden hadn't written it as a comic novel (with the predictable but utterly false comparisons to Pratchett and Aaronovitch), or at least if they'd learned that humour works best when it's understated, not slapping you in the face so hard you wince.

Aleister Crowley MI6: The Hess Solution

Richard C McNeff

Mandrake 2023
Hb, 266pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781914153235

In FT408 I reviewed Richard C McNeff's novel *Aleister Crowley MI5*. Now he's back with *Aleister Crowley MI6: The Hess Solution*. Crowley is living out his last years in the Netherwood guesthouse in Hastings, impoverished and drug-addicted, but still a figure of fascination. He's teaching Latin to Will, a young lad who works at the guesthouse, who wants to become a priest – and Crowley tells him about a manuscript he has that must be saved: the Z File, purportedly the diary of a German with close connections to Rudolf Hess. The novel begins with Hess's ill-fated flight to Scotland, which is still shrouded in mystery even today. There are extracts from the diary, and scenes of intelligence meetings and operations which may or may not have happened in reality – this is, after all, a novel. And it's a star-studded book: among the many characters making a sometimes brief appearance are Lady Frieda Harris (the artist of Crowley's Book of Thoth Tarot), occultist Dion Fortune, Ian Fleming, Anthony Blunt, Maxwell Knight (M), Jack Parsons and Cameron – and even two of the Beatles, high on LSD in a fun scene in a London club. Unlike Aleister Crowley MI5, which followed Crowley and a bunch of his associates from pub to club over 24 hours in a continuous narrative, this one leaps around in place and time, between Hastings and Scotland and Germany and Los Angeles and London, and between Crowley in the late 1940s, secretive events in the 1930s, LA in the 1950s and London in the Swinging Sixties. It's sometimes difficult to keep track of it all, and how much of it, if any, is based in historical truth, who knows? But it's a fun ride.

Relight my Fire

CK McDonnell

Bantam 2024
Hb, 509pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780857505354

CK McDonnell handles the humour much more successfully in his fourth novel about the Manchester-based weekly newspaper, the *Stranger Times*, whose motley crew of journalists (so unlike those of *Fortean Times*!) discover that the paranormal events they get caught up in are far weirder than the ones they write about. *Relight my Fire* starts off with someone on a new drug leaping off a roof to fly, only to crash at the feet of Hannah, assistant editor at *Stranger Times*, who is still trying to figure out her relationship (or not) with DI Tom Sturgess, who is "now working full-time on what at least one of my bosses delights in referring to as 'weirdy bollocks'". Hannah finds herself being a besotted fan-girl to a rock star from her youth – who is involved with a maverick scientist who we eventually discover is *not* someone you want to trifle with… Add to this a series of grave-robbing incidents and a bunch of supernatural figures (some distinctly less friendly than others), and Hannah and her colleagues find themselves caught up in a plot that builds to a genuinely scary climax.

Some comebacks can be murder...
The Stranger Times investigates.
RELIGHT MY FIRE
C. K. McDONNELL

Future shock

A new British sci-fi movie with brains is a complex chamber piece (and observes the classical unities)

A Million Days

Dir Mitch Jenkins, UK 2023
On digital platforms

A Million Days is a British sci-fi drama that belies its limitations to produce an engrossing and complex chamber piece.

The Earth is experiencing a catastrophic environmental disaster and a 'Space Seeding' project is in place to colonise other worlds. On the eve of mission launch, Commander Anderson Reigel (Simon Merrells) and his partner Sam (Kemi-Bo Jacobs), both members of the project, settle down for a romantic farewell evening before Reigel departs for a lunar colony. They are interrupted by colleague Charlie (Hermione Corfield) who brings some shocking data produced by Jay, the AI system underpinning the mission. Unrequested, Jay has run simulations far beyond the timescale of the project – 2,740 years into the future, in fact, the titular million days. The implications of Jay's predictions are so vast that the three team members must strive through the night to literally decide the fate of life itself.

For the most part it works very well. I call it a chamber piece advisedly, for *A Million Days* conforms to good old Aristotle's (or is it Trissino's?) classic unity of time, place and action. The film never leaves its location (Reigel's house), it takes place over just a few hours, and has one central theme. There are sub-plots involving Reigel's love for his former partner, who died in an earlier mission, for which he blames former Captain Gene Campbell (Darrell D'Silva); Campbell's subsequent disappearance; and the sexual tension between the three colleagues; and Sam's knowledge that she is not Reigel's true love. Initially tangential to the main story, these sub-plots become increasingly relevant.

> *There is literally nothing to see except endless plains and forests*

'Action' is perhaps not the best word to use here, because while the film has an epic theme it is concerned not with spaceships and laser pistols but with ideas and relationships. As a consequence, it is very talky. You need to pay attention too, because some of the concepts, and the way crucial information is communicated, can be easy to misunderstand. It's never boring, though, and as the film builds towards the point at which the crucial decision must be made it generates a fair head of steam.

The photography is good and the sets are suitably modern in design without being forced to look futuristic. The script could probably have done with greater clarity and the acting is a bit too earnest to be punchy, but if you like your sci-fi with some brains behind it then look no further.

Daniel King

★★★★☆

The Cat and the Canary

Dir Paul Leni, US 1927
Eureka, Blu-ray

A classic of the comedy-horror genre, *The Cat and the Canary* has been filmed several times. Based on a successful play staged in the US in the early 1920s, the best-known version is that from 1939 starring Bob Hope and Paulette Goddard. However, director Paul Leni's film from 1927 is the OG. The basic plot is as old as the hills: at a gloomy mansion, various parties arrive for the reading of a will and the beneficiary comes under threat from someone – or something – that covets the legacy.

It can be difficult to imagine a place in today's market for a silent film nearly 100 years old. Sure, silent films still have their aficionados – foremost among them being the great Kevin Brownlow, who has more or less dedicated his life to documenting and championing films from the silent era. In the streaming age, with so much new product reaching our screens on a daily basis, I'm not sure whether there's even much awareness that silent films exist, let alone a desire to watch them.

Films from the silent era seem so impossibly remote in time from today's mega-budget superhero epics that people find them difficult to relate to. For instance, one of the actors in Leni's film – Tully Marshall, who plays the lawyer Roger Crosby – was born while the US Civil War was still in progress. To teenagers today, a film from the 1920s must seem like an historical artefact rather than a piece of entertainment.

And yet there is plenty of entertainment to be had in *The Cat and the Canary*. For one thing, it's actually quite modern in its presentation. Okay, the setting is pure gothic, but there are young guys in sharp suits, automobiles, telephones, and all the rest of it. In fact, there's an interesting play between the modern and the gothic going on in it: as well as the more modern elements there are hidden passages, sliding doors, dungeons and disappearing corpses.

The black comedy doesn't land quite so well, although the cynicism survives and there is one great sequence where Creighton James (as the somewhat inept but brave-hearted hero Paul Jones) finds himself hiding under a bed while a young lady gets undressed. Racy for 1927? Not really, for this was before the motion picture industry imposed on itself the terribly puritanical Hays Code.

This new release from Eureka, in their excellent Masters of Cinema series, presents the film on Blu-ray as a 4K restoration of the original negative and it looks sensational. There are multiple extras too: audio commentaries, video essays and many interviews. So do yourself a favour and instead of the latest blockbuster release, take a chance on this and marvel at its beauty, graceful camerawork, magnificent lighting and winning performances. You won't regret it.

Daniel King

★★★☆☆

TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings

I tend to steer clear of conspiracy-themed TV programmes. Even fictional ones (looking at you, *X-Files*) can easily end up digging colossal holes that can only be repaired by digging even bigger holes; so series purporting to be factual often entangle themselves in ever-tightening knots. The ones that buy into the idea wholesale invariably become so excited that they abandon all pretence of a balanced view, while those that attempt to take a dispassionate view frequently come up wanting. Also of note is the sheer number of times cephalopods are associated with high-level secret and malign organisations – think Hydra or the Spectre logo – and A*merican Conspiracy – The Octopus Murders* (Netflix) is another entry in the already burgeoning pile.

Film-maker Zachary Treitz follows his friend, photo-journalist Christian Hansen, as he investigates the death of fellow reporter Danny Casolaro, who appeared to have been on the verge of exposing a massive cover-up involving "The Octopus" (See? Those clever multi-limbed critters again!), an apparently overarching conglomerate dedicated to ruthlessly… something or other. Lots of establishing shots of Casolaro, clearly a fun-loving guy and not the sort of wild-eyed, driven journo we've come to expect. He did, however, have a theory about mysterious deaths, spyware, money laundering and White House shenanigans such as Iran-Contra and the sort of huge pay-offs the US intelligence machine seemed to make to unsavoury types in the name of "the greater good"; and the central driver of the series is a combination of examining whether or not this is an actual thing and, if so, whether Casolaro's death was as a result of him getting too close to the truth.

He had a theory about mysterious deaths and White House shenanigans

After the preamble, the narrative takes us back to Virginia in August 1991 (establishing shots of lawn sprinklers, etc) as a hotel handyman explains that, having discovered Casolaro's body in one of the rooms, he thought, "There's something very wrong in here", which could easily function as the strapline for the whole series. Casolaro's death was ruled a suicide; however, there were enough inconsistencies to bring this into question. The resulting narrative – that, post-WWII, former intelligence agents from a number of countries formed an alliance to blackmail those in positions of power and enrich themselves – does sound both plausible and familiar to anyone who's ever watched any of these programmes or read a Marvel comic: however, the series is hampered by two things: a lot of suggestion, but a lack of strong evidence, and a soundtrack that distracts irritatingly from the narrative – and any programme with such labyrinthine plotting needs clarity. Casolaro may well have been on the verge of an exposé, but he deserves a better testament than this.

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

When people hear I'm ordained, they often assume I grew up in the church. Wrong! I found churches (and Christians) kind of scary. Especially when they smiled during hymns or passed a cup to guzzle Jesus's blood. The creepiest, though, was when congregations stood to intone liturgy as one; all those voices saying 'Thanks be to God' in unison evoked the same monotone I heard in horror movies, where weird cultists stood in a circle, chanting stuff to the Devil. It's no surprise, then, to find a rich tradition of horror films set in ecclesiastical environments – which is the case for four horror releases this month.

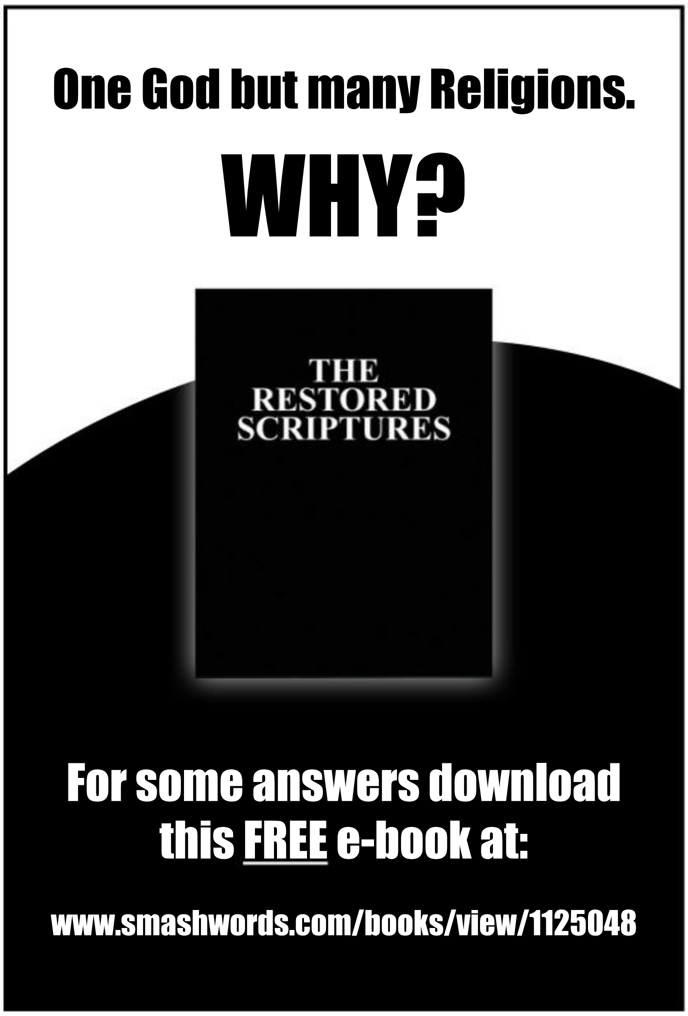
City of the Living Dead (Cauldron Films) comes in hot with a priest hanging himself in a graveyard – an act so vile, we're told, it opens the gates of Hell. I first saw this as a kid, and for weeks afterwards I was genuinely worried that my local vicar would commit suicide. A journalist and a psychic (fresh from a premature burial, no less) rush to Dunwich to close the portal. They're faced with maggot blizzards, slimy, teleporting zombies, and an amazing sequence where a woman vomits up all of her internal organs. The superb score by Fabio Frizzi pulses over wince-worthy brutality and gorgeous shots of gothic beauty. It's my favourite Lucio Fulci movie, with moments of serious creepiness – watch out for the slow zoom into a handprint… on a funeral home carpet.

The priest in *Lord of Misrule* (Signature Entertainment) doesn't kill herself at the start, but she's got good reason to consider it 50 minutes in. Rev Rebecca Holland is the new vicar in an English village, and she tries to respect the traditional beliefs of the locals – until her daughter goes missing on the night of a pagan festival. With its locals in animal masks and a missing girl, it's impossible to avoid *Wicker Man* comparisons. This isn't in that league and feels more like an ITV drama. Yet the strong performances, handsome photography, and occasional twisted streak make this an enjoyable, diverting folk horror.

I found churches (and Christians) kind of scary

The clerical carnage continues with fan favourite *The Borderlands* (Second Sight), out on a fancy new Blu-Ray with extra extras and a 70-page book. It's one of the best found-footage horrors around, in which Vatican investigators try to verify strange happenings in a rural Devon church. The funny script and believable cast lull you into a cruel sense of connection with the priests – so when the bad stuff starts, you're as spooked, disturbed, and devastated as they are: a genuinely creepy movie.

Finally, we get *Deliver Us*, (Prime Video) in which a cloistered Russian nun immaculately conceives twins – but what an awkward combo: one is the Messiah, the other the Antichrist! The Vatican sends Father Fox, so named because he looks like an erotic novel version of a foxy priest. The opening promises epic horror that never really comes, and despite its undeniable zeal, it's all too serious and weirdly paced. If anyone else watches this, perhaps you could email me to tell me what it was about.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THE
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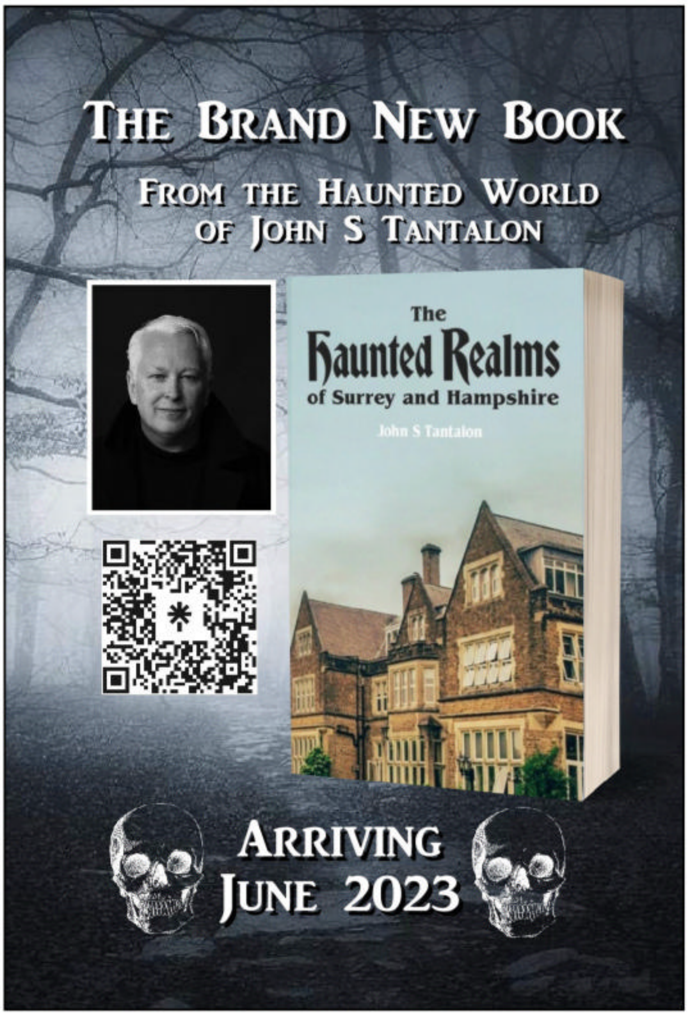
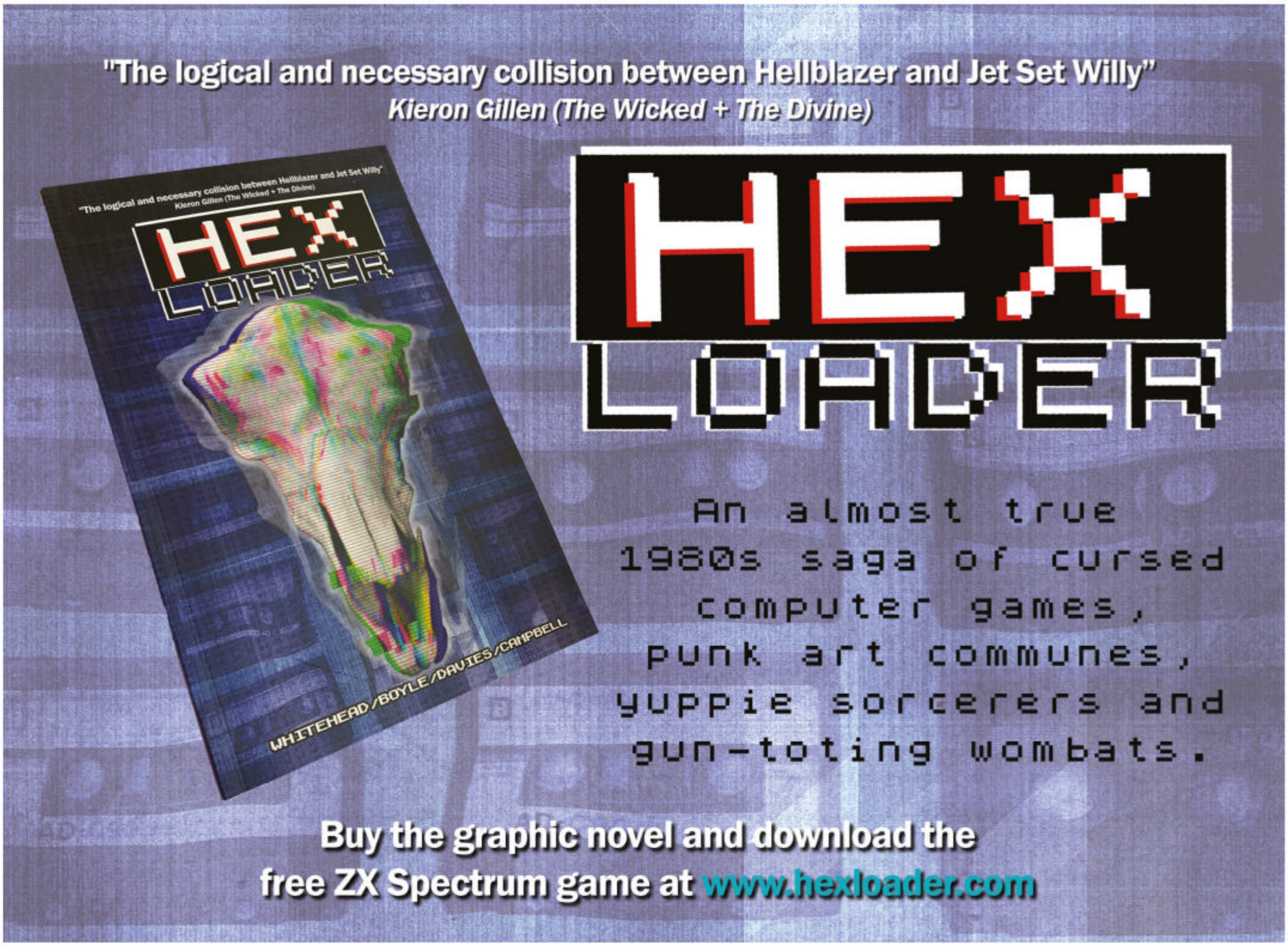

THE BRAND NEW BOOK

FROM THE HAUNTED WORLD
OF JOHN S TANTALON

ARRIVING
JUNE 2023
The
Haunted Realms
of Surrey and Hampshire
John S Tantalon


"The logical and necessary collision between Hellblazer and Jet Set Willy"
Kieron Gillen (The Wicked + The Divine)

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LETTERS

CONTACT US BY POST: PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE CT1 9RH, OR E-MAIL SIEVEKING@FORTEANTIMES.COM
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Veteran subscriber

Let me add my congratulations to *Fortean Times* for hitting (now surpassing) its half-century milestone.

After I addressed McMaster University's "Velikovsky and the Recent History of the Solar System" symposium in 1974, Canadian Mr X approached and asked if I knew about Charles Fort. Told "No," he urged that I get *The Book of the Damned*. I did and was immediately captivated. I learned about a publication being devoted to Fort's research and musings, and subscribed to *The News* [as the first 16 issues of FT were called]. Correspondence with editor Bob Rickard ensued.

One highlight of my first trip to the UK in late 1975 was meeting Bob at his London flat where he graciously offered his Spontaneous Human Combustion (SHC) file to aid my early research of combustion conundrums.

(Also memorable: days later on New Year's Eve night I gained access to Stonehenge with an after-hours, security guard-led flashlight tour, then being left alone amid the blue stones. Outstanding!)

With a collection going back to Issue 1 of *The News* (November 1973), I continue to find *Fortean Times* hallmarked with outstanding scholarship and exemplary writing by its contributors, who to this subscriber inspire awe and wonderment with every issue.

Here's to the Universe granting *FT* many more years informing inquisitive generations about the curious, the unconventional, and the truly confounding; that is, forteana.

Larry Arnold
Director, PSI: ParaScience International, Harrisburg, PA

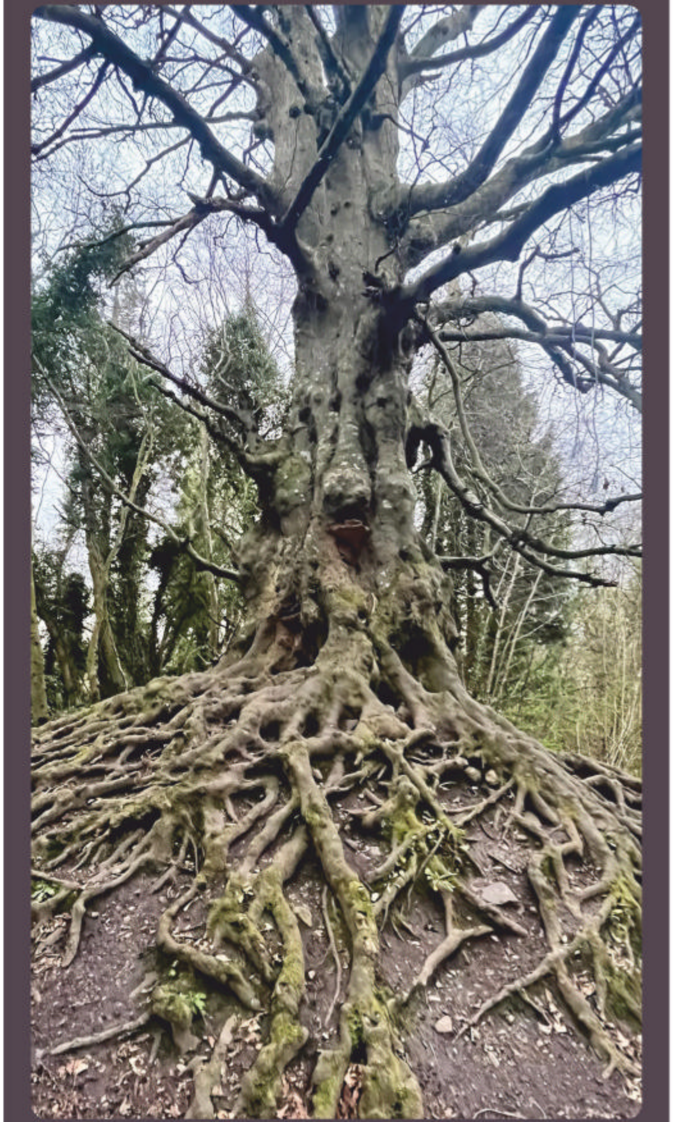
Letting it happen

The news pundits have categorised the recent Rochdale by-election Labour candidate, Azhar Ali's conspiracy theory (that Israel allowed the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack to go ahead in order to provide an excuse for a full-scale invasion of Gaza), as typical of antisemitic conspiracy theories. While it may have been used for antisemitic purposes, the theory itself is surely a variant of the old Pearl Harbor conspiracy: that FDR got wind of Japanese plans for a sneak attack on Hawaii, but let them proceed so that America could enter World War II on the Allied side. Public opinion in the USA up until that time had tended to favour isolationism. Coincidentally, both attacks took place on the seventh day of the month.

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

Noel Rooney comments:
The LIHOP theory of 7 October (they let it happen on purpose) is indeed a descendant of other conspiracy theories, and Pearl Harbor is among them. The intentional stand-down has more recent vintage; it refers to 9/11 and in particular the actions of Dick Cheney.

SIMULACRA CORNER



Mark Rome spotted this 'treebeard" in a woodland at Balrath, County Meath, Ireland.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to **Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH** or to **sieveking@forteantimes.com**

It's all Greek to me

In Strange Days [**FT442:8**] we read about some hungry sheep in "Magnesia, Greece" who broke into the medical marijuana greenhouse of "Yiannis Bourounis" and ate the crop. In Ulrich Magin's column in the same issue [**FT442:22**] we read about some hungry sheep "near Almyros in the region of Thessaly" who broke into the medical cannabis greenhouse of "Jannis Burunis" and ate the crop. This is clearly the same story with two different descriptions of the one geographic location and two different transliterations of the same Greek name.

I hope the recurrence of the same story twice in a single issue of FT is not an indication that the global supply of weird news is running low. In these troubled times we need more weirdness, not less.

Daniel Kitto
Norwich, Norfolk

Early SHC

Hugh Henry asks about Classical references to Spontaneous Human Combustion [**FT442:61**]. Moses was once said to look as if his head was aflame after a vision, with some translations giving *Corona* (glowing), others *Cornuta* (horns).

Then there is Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego surviving in the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar's court as related in the Book of Daniel.

Finally, the *South Park* team managed to wring a whole episode out of the idea, with basically "what the hell do you expect will happen to you if you hold your farts in?" as the lofty comedic premise.

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

LETTERS

Comments on FT442

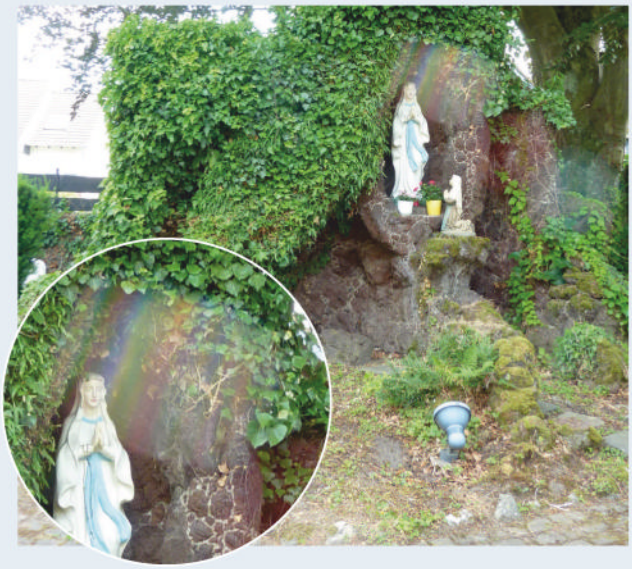
- Ulrich Magin's account In Strange Continent [p.22] of small dots seen after an enormous flash of lightning, reminds me of an experience I had while living in the Copperbelt region of Zambia. The area was notorious for thunderstorms, and on at least two occasions I was looking out the window at the storm, when there was a deafening crack of thunder, and a simultaneous blinding flash of lightning, after which all the lights went out, and a mass of stationary tiny white lights filled my vision, apparently outside the window. At the time I put this down to an optical effect, but perhaps it was an electrical phenomenon. I also remember an occasion when we were driving somewhere and facing an enormous dark storm cloud, with lightning frequently flashing within it, but not discharging into the ground. It was quite a dramatic sight.

- The account of the waves generated by the ferry to Palma, also in Strange Continent [p.23], brought back memories as well. In my late teens I worked at the hovercraft terminal in Ryde, which is about 5.7 miles across from Southsea. Several times the huge liner *SS France* sailed into Southampton and out again, and even though it was travelling slowly, the bow wave came right up onto the hovercraft slipway at Ryde, and presumably at Southsea too.

- In the article Enigmatic UAPs [p.28], Nigel Watson quotes Andrew May as saying that you can't have an "Identified Anomalous Phenomenon", as it's "a contradiction in terms". I have to disagree. An anomaly is simply something outside the norm. For example, conjoined twins are an anomaly, but science now understands how that occurs. However, I share his criticism of the term UAP when it is used to stand for Unidentified *Anomalous* Phenomena. As a replacement for the term UFO, *Aerial* is the only term that makes sense.

- Jenny Randles's account of a tornado, given in UFO Files [p.29], is similar to an experience my wife and I had while living on a housing estate in the south of England. We were in our house when we heard a sound like very heavy rainfall. No rain was falling, but the nearby trees were being blown in every direction at once. It stopped after a few minutes. Next morning we saw on the news that a "small" tornado had touched down on our estate the previous evening. We went out to look for damage, and a few hundred yards away we saw a house whose garage roof had been blown clean off and disappeared. On its way, it had hit the corner of a neighbouring house and knocked off a chunk of brickwork. Not up to Tornado Alley standards, but impressive enough.

Dave Miles
By email



BVM illuminated

On 26 June 2023 I took a series of about a dozen photos of our local Hennef Marian grotto for a book project. Looking at the images later on my computer screen I found one of them had a lens flare which envelops the BVM's head in a multicoloured halo or aura – not actually supernatural, but most impressive. It is the only photo among the dozen that shows this curious effect.

Ulrich Magin *Hennef, Germany*

Propellentless drive update

It looks like the propellentless drive [**FT441:11**] did not get a chance to be tested this time due to a failure in the carrier satellite. We are now left in suspense until they can get a replacement one up.

Statement from Rogue Space:

"Rogue Space Systems operations team is announcing the suspension of the active phase of our first on orbit mission. Barry 1 was launched on November 11, 2023, and has been in orbit since then. It was designed to test our Scalable Compute Platform (SCP) and its ability to aggregate data from multiple sensors and process that data in real time. We had ongoing power-system issues on the bus through LEOP (Launch and Early Orbit Phase), and after two months of operations, towards the end of LEOP, we lost communication with the satellite. Rogue performed some testing of the SCP and never had the opportunity to test the IVO drive. I'd like to take the opportunity to praise IVO for being a great customer, and we are in discussions on a second attempt during one of our upcoming new missions." – Jon Beam, CEO

David Hambling
By email

Diana's dog of death

Re-reading my recent *FT* article about the alleged Diana-Morrissey conspiracy [**FT442:50-51**] brought back some long-buried memories of a late-night talk-show on the subject I recall watching as a callow youth back at the time of Princess Di's 1997 death (I think on Channel 4), during which some nascent conspiracy theories about precisely how it was Diana really ended up in a fatal car crash in a Paris tunnel were discussed. Unexpectedly, one guest suggested she had been assassinated by a special black dog sitting on the back seat of the car in front which, like a weaponised Black Shuck, had fired red laser-beams from its eyes directly into the face of Diana's driver, disorientating him and making him crash, rather than him simply being highly pissed, as per the standard narrative.

As I recall, the host ensured that discussion quickly moved on from this intriguing suggestion towards something far less interesting and worthy of my remembrance two-and-a-half decades later.

I have tried searching out more info about this online, and find there is indeed a fringe theory that a so-called SAS 'lamping unit' used lasers akin to a "man-made lightning bolt" to perform a similar stunt, but can discover nothing whatsoever about a deadly trained laser-dog (or possibly a laser-gun merely *camouflaged* as a back-seat nodding-dog car-toy or something?) being involved. [see https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/429536/EXCLUSIVE-SAS-s-lamping-unit-used-laser-to-dazzle-Princess-Diana-s-driver]

Did I imagine this strange televisual event, misinterpret, or simply misremember it? Does anyone know who this conspiracy theorist was, and if he was serious, just a nut, or perhaps even Mohamed al Fayed in disguise? Like Dodi's dad, I too would dearly like to know the truth!

SD Tucker
Widnes, Cheshire

Invisible Barrier?

I have a huge number of books on fortean phenomena and one is *Phenomena: A Book of Wonders,* co-written by John Michell and Bob Rickard, founding editor of

Fortean Times.[1] In a chapter on 'invisible barriers', I found reference to a newspaper cutting from Newcastle's *The Journal* dated 8 Dec 1975, about an apparent force-field which momentarily appeared in a car park in Durham. I decided to research it further.

SPACE ODDITY!

'Force Field' stops car.

A mysterious force field is at work keeping cars at bay in a North city's parking complex.

If you doubt it just ask County Durham housewife Dilys Cant. She tried to break through the mystery barrier and found it impregnable.

Even scientists are baffled. The parking bay by the entrance at Durham City's Leazes Bowl car park is now out of bounds to the public.

In fact, Mrs Cant, of Ridgeway, Coxhoe, thought she had stepped into the realms of science fiction when she tried to park her Mini in the multi-storey car park.

Three times she tried to reverse the car into the space and three times the car was stopped by the mystery force.

But she is not the only victim of the riddle.

She told her daughter-in-law Mrs Rosina Cant, and she had a go at beating the barrier.

She found another motorist facing the same problem.

'One man was trying to get his car in and it wouldn't go. He asked another man who must have thought he was a bit of a nut case, to help him,' said Rosina.

They checked the hand-brake was off and then tried to push the car in but it still wouldn't budge.

CHECKS

After complaints about the riddle, council officials carried out a series of checks. They managed to drive their cars in – but just to be on the safe side they have now cordoned the area off.

One theory is that the space – next to the electronic ticket issuing machines – is hit by a force-field from the equipment.

But one baffled boffin, Dr Martin Morant, senior electronics lecturer at Durham University, admitted last night: 'This is a real mystery all right.'

He said the chances of the cars setting up the force field as they passed the ticket machines was highly unlikely.

'I don't know the electronics system, but I know the car park and I wouldn't think the electronics could put a restraint on the car,' he added.[2]

The article didn't sound like a hoax or fake news to me, so I decided to track down the original report and make further enquiries.

An archive assistant at the central library in Newcastle kindly located the article from *The Journal*, which was stored on microfiche, who then scanned it, and emailed it to me.

I wrote to the newspaper in question asking them to print an appeal to its readers about the report and to see if the matter was ever resolved. Whether they did this or not, I don't know, but I didn't receive any replies. I also sent copies of the report to several electronics magazines, in the hope that their staff or readers could offer a solution and, again, I received no replies! I also wrote to companies and other organisations that manufacture and maintain car park barriers and ticketing machines – and I received one reply.

Ian Harrison emailed me (29 Oct 2023) to say: "One of the companies you wrote to doesn't have the time to be able to respond to you directly. However, I am a friend of many of the employees, so they passed me your details.

"The reason they did this is they are aware I have an interest in healthy scepticism (I've attended QED multiple times), and I'm also an experienced electrical engineer with a thorough working knowledge of access control barriers.

"When considering this [mystery], I think we need to give context to the technology in use. These ticket machines were mechanical in nature with only very basic electrical components. The electrical aspect of this machine would have been a basic micro switch that would have been operated by coins being put in. Once that micro switch was operated, then a coin or ticket would have been issued mechanically.

"At no point in this process is an ElectroMagneticField (EMF) utilised beyond what exists in a normal flow of electricity. If the ticket machine is a ticket-receiving machine, built next to a barrier, then the barrier also wouldn't cause this issue.

"The motors in barriers are one of four options: three phase induction, single phase induction, DC, and actuated motors. Single and three-phase motors work in exactly the same way as a motor on a conveyer belt we see in factories. If these were capable of 'force fields', then there would be no need for any other health and safety precautions.

"A DC motor just directs electricity in one direction for forwards and reverses it for backwards. This kind of motor works on the same principles as a printer motor. An actuated motor is part-DC motor, but with a more mechanical element. These motors are used in nursing home hoists, used to assist residents in and out of bed. Barriers almost always use single, three phase and DC motors due to their cost, efficiency and reliability.

"In modern-day devices we do utilise EMFs, i.e. contactless payment methods, wireless charging of devices etc, but these fields are not strong enough to be noticed without specialist equipment or their desired effects. Some of these devices are on modern ticket machines and barriers.

"So far, [scientists] are only able to make weak force-fields using super conductors (approximately the size of an MRI machine). These weak fields are able to slow the progress of objects – but could not stop a car.

"Given the information in the article, it is more likely that there was a problem overcoming the inertia of the vehicles. Something like a slight incline could be sufficient to hold a heavy 1970s car, or even stone chippings under the tyres.

"Other considerations to make in regards to trying to push a car is its direction. If we were to push a car from this era it would be easier to do from the rear as there is a larger area to put our weight behind, compared to the front with a lower bonnet than in more modern cars.

"This may seem counter intuitive, but much of the pressure exerted would have been wasted by pushing in a downward direction due to the shape of the car. Think: if your hands are on the bonnet, you're pushing down and forwards, whereas from the rear your entire body is just pushing forwards.

"As a broader view of the situation, from a sceptic's perspective, without having knowledge of the exact conditions, we can't make an absolute statement. Had we had pictures of the area on the day [that] the events took place, we could make an educated guess.

"The council tried to replicate the events to no avail, so I would surmise it's down to the conditions on the day that are ordinary and mundane."[3]

● Many thanks to Ian Harrison, and if any readers have comments or suggestions for a solution, please can they get in touch with me through my website https://owensandy.com

Sources

[1] John Michell and Robert JM Rickard, *Phenomena: A Book of Wonders* (Thames and Hudson, 1977, p.95)

[2] *The Journal* (Newcastle), 8 Dec 1975: Space Oddity! 'Force Field' stops car.

[3] Ian Harrison email, 29 Oct 2023.

Andy Owens
Halifax, West Yorkshire

Velocirapper

CLIVE GODDARD

It Happened to Me...

Readers write in with their own accounts of strange phenomena

A bent fork

On the evening of 10 October 2023, my son and daughter and I were eating dinner in a local Mexican restaurant in Tucson, Arizona. We were eating soft food with the usual restaurant utensils. I told my son the anecdote about how Uri Geller got a woman pregnant via TV without being sued for child support. You know, the IUD incident.

I was very wrong to tell this story because my daughter's attitude toward Geller is just like Amazing Randi's, and I had promised not to mention Geller in her hearing, ever. "We agreed," she reminded me sternly, "not to speak Uri Geller's name." She inserted the fork she had been using all evening into her squishy fried beans. The fork came out bent over a third of its length.

"Lousy inferior metal," she murmured, staring at it. My son and I said nothing. I am sure Randi would have examined the fork, compared it to my son's and mine (which weren't bent) and quizzed the restaurant staff about how often their forks 'melted' in refried beans. Strangely, my daughter didn't.

I think that's just as well. John Keel believed there are cosmic tricksters that never really die and devote themselves to making everybody miserable. And what did the Indrid Cold gang really do to him? Got him expensive arguments with the telephone company, that's all. If Geller is one of them, he's much higher class. He's had a very entertaining life of fame, adulation and controversy, not to mention money, and he could keep everybody stirred up without torturing them. He worked miracles, helped people learn about their psychic powers, advanced scientific knowledge, met outer space aliens, charmed ladies, modestly admitted he wasn't perfect, and tricked innocent people out of their money by outrageous con games – depending on whom you ask! Never a dull moment, no peace!

He must be preparing for his next incarnation now. If he plays a good-natured prank on a critic's fork, why complain? What I really can't believe is that, until I wrote this letter, I didn't think of stealing that fork. Guess I was just too well brought up.

Leslie Vinson
Tucson, Arizona

COURTESY URI GELLER

I had promised not to mention Uri Geller in her hearing, ever

This is my house

Ms Levack's letter about her late mother's habitual concern that she wasn't wearing her coat and the stranger who approached her to ask the same thing [**FT442:64**] reminded me of a weird incident that occurred when my estranged uncle died (about six years ago).

The day before the funeral I was at home alone and happened to glance out the window. A stranger, a young man of about 20, came walking along the footpath outside our gate at a fast pace, turned quickly into our driveway, and rapped on the front door. I answered and immediately he began babbling incoherently about this being his house and demanding to come in.

I had never seen him before, and had lived in the house for years, it having been left to my mother when my grandfather died. I calmed him down, told him that he must be mistaken and he seemed to come to his senses. With a baffled and slightly embarrassed look he retraced his steps and I never saw him again. I pondered the strange incident for some days afterwards. It was rather disconcerting.

My late uncle had been in a dispute with my mother over the house and always maintained that it should have been his. He probably went to his grave feeling cheated out of what he believed was his rightful inheritance.

Ms Levack's deceased mother seemingly inspired a complete stranger to ask her where her coat was; was this another example of the same kind of thing?

MGS (name and address on file)
Ireland

A French fairy

When my brother retired from his job as an electrical engineer on Sealink Ferries, he and his wife Pat bought a house in the tiny village of Sistels in southwest France, the nearest city being Agen. The building was a tumbledown ruin and in need of a lot of renovation. They bought a caravan as a temporary home and set about restoring the house. I would go and stay with him for a week or so, every now and then, helping with all the work that needed doing. At the end of the working day, while dinner was cooking, we would cycle to Dunes, the next village, and have a couple of drinks in the bar in the centre of town in the Place des Martyrs (Martyrs' Square). This was named after the 12 men executed by the Germans, who were advancing northwards to oppose the D Day landings. The French Resistance had harassed the German Army ever since they left their southern base and because of this, a unit of SS soldiers marched into the village, selected 12 men and hanged them from a balcony in the square. Oradour-sur-Glane was their next stop.

One evening in the bar, as we were enjoying our beers, bathed in wonderful warm evening sunshine, all of a sudden out of the corner of my eye I saw what I can only describe as a fairy, drifting through the air. She was about 2ft (60cm) tall and a beautiful golden colour, with silky wings and a lithe female body. She moved slowly towards the shutters of the bar windows that were pushed back against the wall. She glided towards the shutter, disappeared behind it and was gone.

Well, I thought this was a track of the light, my imagination running wild – but then my brother exclaimed, "What the hell was that?" For my brother to react like this was very unusual. He was not given to flights of fancy. I shot up and looked behind the shutter: nothing, absolutely nothing. We sat there looking at each other and then in unison said, "Did you see that?" We asked each other what we had seen. I described the figure, but my brother would only admit that it was something very strange.

Stuart Smith
Walmer, Kent

Phone call from beyond

This is a story that I have carried around with me for nearly 50 years. At the time I was employed as a clerical officer for the Department of Health and Social Security in Great Oaks House in Basildon, Essex. The office in Great Oaks in the mid-1970s when this incident happened was spread over a number of floors with the rest of the building being occupied by other Government departments. The analogue telephone system was typical for its time in that there were very few direct lines in to the building. Most desks had a telephone which could be rung internally from another telephone in the building, but which could only be connected to a member of the public ringing from outside via the manually operated switchboard.

Each person claiming benefit had a case-paper wallet within which was stored all claims that person had made both current and dormant. When the case was current and being worked on, it would be kept on the desk of the staff member who was working on the case; if it was current but not being worked on, it would be filed alphabetically in what was called a 'Live Run'. If the case was dormant, it would be filed alphabetically behind a pink index card, this time in what was called the 'Dormant Run'. The claims themselves, and all work undertaken on them, were paper-based.

The following events took place in the mid-1970s, on a Friday afternoon just after 5pm. At that period the office was open to the public from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Thursday, and 9am to 4:30pm on Friday. On this Friday as per usual, with the office having closed at 4:30pm, most staff had left. I was on the floor that had the public waiting area on it, which by this time was locked. The staff side of the public waiting area opened on to an open plan area part of the office through one door. The office side of the public waiting area had two desks, both with telephones on them. As I was walking past the door to the staff side of the public waiting area I heard a telephone ring. Had I not been near the door even in a deserted office, it is highly unlikely I would have heard it. What struck me was why would anyone be ringing that phone after that part of the office had been closed for over half an hour? What really threw me was the fact that these telephones had two ringing tones by which you could tell if the call was internal or external, and the tone told me that the call was external.

She said Dermot Morgan had died suddenly of a heart attack

My first thought was how can this phone be ringing with an external call if the switchboard itself had been closed for over half an hour? I picked up the phone and could hear the voice of what I took to be a very old woman who sounded as if she was miles away, since I could barely hear her and make out what she was saying. I kept asking her to speak up, but all I managed to ascertain before the line went dead was her name and the fact that she had not eaten for four days. I put the phone down and as I walked out of the public area a work colleague called Joyce approached me. I told her what had happened when the phone rang again, again with the ringing tone of an outside call. I asked Joyce if she would take the call while I went up to the switchboard to see what an earth they were doing putting calls through at this hour. When I got to the switchboard the room was in darkness and it was quite apparent that no one had been there for some time.

I went back downstairs and Joyce told me the conversation she had on the phone, which exactly mirrored mine, before the line again went dead on her. As before, the woman sounded miles away and had just stated her name and the fact that she had not eaten for four days. We both went over to the 'Live Run', but could find no case paper wallet there and in the 'Dormant Run' we found an index card for the person, but again no case-paper wallet behind it. It was now near 6pm, so we decided there was really nothing we could do even if we found the case-paper wallet, so we decided to leave it until Monday when we were back in the office.

Monday morning came and I was sitting at my desk when I saw Joyce approaching me looking as white as a sheet. She said she knew why we could not find the woman's case-paper and why she had not eaten for four days: the case-paper was filed within the 'Dormant Run' within which is a 'Dead Run', where cases are filed when the case goes dormant due to death. The woman had died on the Tuesday, three days before the Friday phone calls.

Geoff Tuffnell

Acomb, North Yorkshire

Editor's note: For more on this phenomenon, see 'Phone calls from the dead' by Theo Paijmans [**FT405:30-35**], and **FT246:8, 289:18-19**.

RIP

I had a similar experience to SD Tucker's account of his dream of Kirsty MacColl at the time of her passing ['Not Waving, But Drowning', **FT442:65**].

Back in the 1990s I would stay at a friend's house on a Saturday and he would drive me home the following day. On one such stay in 1998 I had a rather mundane – for me – dream which was memorable only for its context. The whole dream was just a casual discussion between me and my friend over whether they would continue making *Father Ted* now that the actor who played the titular character was dead. This was odd because, as far as I knew, the actor was very much still alive. During the drive back to my home on the Sunday I told my friend about this dream and we had a bit of a laugh over how random it was.

Later in the day I headed down to my living room just as the early evening news was finishing to be greeted by my mother declaiming, "You'll never believe what's happened!" She then told me that Dermot Morgan, Father Ted himself, had died suddenly of a heart attack the previous night. I instantly called my friend so we could both be baffled by this turn of events.

Back in the mid- to late 1990s I used to usually to go to sleep listening to a radio, most often tuned in 5 Live or Radio 4. I didn't, however, take my radio with me on a Saturday night and would instead sometimes listen to my friend's CD Walkman with the headphones pointing towards me, on repeat. So there was no chance I had heard this piece of news on the radio while I slept and it had worked itself into my dream. I also believe the news of his death had not been released until the Sunday afternoon.

Like SD Tucker's dream this wasn't a precognitive dream but somehow knowledge of something I couldn't possibly know or wasn't party to, happening at the same time. No lottery number premonitions for me then!

Stu Ferrol

Hexham, Northumberland

Raining Stones

Reading the poltergeist stone-throwing feature [**FT442:30-35**] made me think of an incident that happened to me in 1992. I was waiting for a 101 bus at North Woolwich in London on a quiet Sunday afternoon on my way back from my then girlfriend's place in Abbey Wood. It was early spring, slightly cloudy but there was no sign of rain. The bus pulled up at the stop and I waited for the driver to condescend to let me on board.

Gradually at first, I became aware of little stones pitter-pattering around me. My first thought was "Bastard kids again!" But no, it wasn't very developed around there in those days and quite open. There was nowhere they could've been. This was a steady rain of yellowy brown stones and pebbles, similar to the type found in sand and gravel pits, and getting heavier. I put my leather jacket over my head for protection. The stones hit the side of the bus and actually smashed one of the side windows. The stones stopped after about 30 seconds.

As it was only me at the stop, I was expecting the bus driver to get out and have a go at me, but he just started the engine and drove off. I stood there thinking that maybe that sort of thing happened round there all the time and waited for the next bus. It's something that's always puzzled me.

Kevin Birnie

London

LETTERS

Pennies appear

In his excellent collection of essays *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, Britain's greatest living horror author Ramsey Campbell considers the possibility that he may be living in a haunted house. Although a sceptic, in the essay 'The Nearest to a Ghost' he recounts some strange experiences he has experienced in the guest room of a house he has lived in on the Liverpool waterfront since 1984.

Neatly stacked pennies would appear on the bookshelves of this room, and on one occasion whilst in the room he turned to see and hear a penny landing on the floor.

Another time, he slept in the room to spare his wife from his snoring, and felt something beside him in the bed. On another occasion, before leaving for a holiday, he looked into the room and asked the entity to watch over his house while he was away – and felt something like a reassuring hand, cobweb-like, on his bare shoulder.

Mark Hopper
Hull, East Yorkshire

Bookshop synchronicities

I work in a large bookshop, and have noticed a number of potentially meaningful coincidences during my time there. Most of them are interesting, but not bizarre. The most common example is when a customer asks for a book I had only just shelved earlier in the day. This would not be remarkable if the book were new, or a bestseller. However, most of the time this happens with obscure or special-interest books I have never seen before. Slightly weirder is when I'm talking about a book with a colleague and within a few minutes a customer comes up to buy the book we were discussing. Again, this never happens with new books or bestsellers.

The weirdest incident happened a few months ago. I was talking to a colleague and making a joke about Clippit, the silly paperclip character who would appear and offer you help when you used Microsoft Office Assistant years ago ("It looks like you're writing a letter," etc.). The next customer who came up to the counter was wearing a necklace with a pendant in the shape of this anthropomorphic paperclip! I suppose I could have noticed this subconsciously before talking to my workmate, but even so it is a bit of an odd thing.

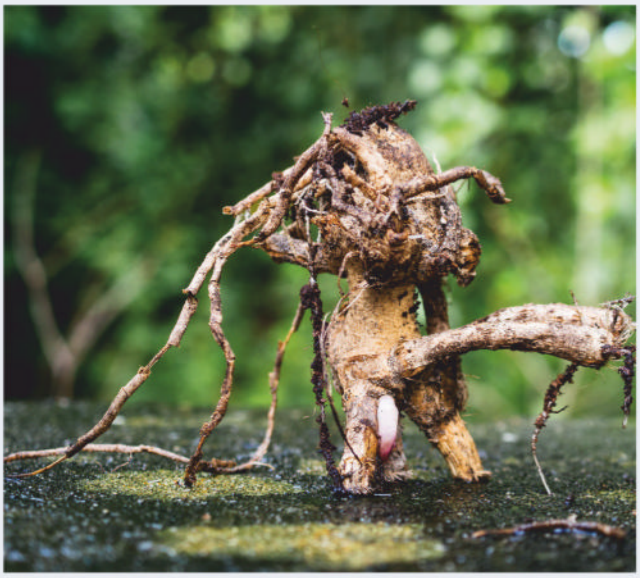
I suppose the size and reputation of the bookshop make it more likely that customers will ask for obscure or niche titles. Booksellers are bound to talk about books, and even if those books aren't shelved on my floor, people will look for the shortest queue and buy them from me. But each coincidence seems to hint at a pattern that makes daily life just a bit more interesting.

Lewis Hurst
London

Root of all evil

I photographed this monstrosity recently in the garden. The figure is standing on legs with two outstretched arms. There's what looks like tentacles coming from the back of the head and it even appears to have a male appendage! It is about 5in (13cm) in height and reminds me of something like a voodoo doll. Quite creepy and somewhat sinister. Perhaps it could be something from folklore, such as a troll…

Richard Moore, *County Tyrone, Northern Ireland*



Life after death

From all I have seen, there is no solid independent evidence for or against some form of afterlife, and I don't believe there ever will be. Feel free to correct me, but I've never found any convincing argument on rational grounds. The evidence for is anecdotal, the evidence against simply dogma. No one on either side of the argument can come back and tell us about it in a way everyone will accept.

The against crowd will trot out Occam's razor, but let me point out the flaw with the axiom; It isn't wide enough. It's one thing not to multiply entities; it should also advise us not to multiply conclusions. The razor is not a recipe for proof; it advises us not to build castles in the air unsupported by evidence, but we should also beware of building unnecessary negative conclusions, or exclusions, unsupported by evidence.

In a field like engineering, it is important to be right, to find a firm conclusion, or there are consequences. Once you get out into the unknown, the field of forteana, you can safely stand in extensive patches of uncertainty. It is unnecessary to come to a conclusion, perhaps even vital *not* to. This is one of Fort's greatest contributions to human thought: he encourages us not to reach conclusions unless it is practically necessary to do so.

I think the lazy inclination to slip down the slippery sides of the fortean curve to either belief or disbelief is responsible for some of the disillusion among forteans – see the article about Middle Aged Mulder Syndrome, [**FT415:58-59**]. We should forget about conclusions in forteana and watch the patterns dance, until something resolves into coherence or necessity demands a decision.

To get back to the subject, we cannot prove that there is no method, or mechanism, or state of being beyond our understanding, to which we pass when we die. There is no solid evidence against this, or for it, and our tendency to dismiss it I believe is rooted in our opposition to, and battles with, those who dogmatically insist that it is a reality, and that they have all the answers.

I also believe that many people torture themselves with an adherence to this dogma in order to inure themselves to the pain it inevitably brings. They want to hold on to the certainty, however terrible, that they will never see their loved ones again, that they and all they love will pass out of existence and come to nothing, because they cannot bear to allow themselves the hope that it could be otherwise.

Hope makes everything hurt more, and some people are uncomfortable with uncertainty. This attitude hurts people. It's been demonstrated that those with faith in an afterlife cope better with life's stresses, and can even live longer.

That is not an argument to believe. Based purely on the facts, on rational assessment, there is no reason to believe or disbelieve, and no particular consequences either way. So maybe we should leave it up to our hearts? A bit more trust of ourselves wouldn't hurt. Try out the other side's point of view, see how it feels to live with it, but don't get tangled up in lists and logic and thought; see how it feels.

Dean Teasdale
Gateshead, Tyne & Wear

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WHY FORTEAN?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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Fortean Traveller

140. Overtoun House and Bridge

EMILIA UKKONEN goes walkies on Scotland's notorious "dog suicide bridge"

After reading about the mysterious "dog suicide bridge" in Scotland (see **FT196:4, 331:22**), I decided to visit the place myself. Overtoun Bridge became infamous when the media reported that hundreds of dogs had leapt from the bridge for no apparent reason, injuring or killing themselves on the rocks below. Some people place the blame for their deaths on a ghost.

I travelled first to Glasgow on a rainy February day, and from there went by train and local bus to Dumbarton the next day. The weather had turned rather sunny and spring was in the air. From the bus stop, helped by Google Maps, I hiked up a hill in the direction of Overtoun House. The landscape was hilly and dotted with cows and horses, and everything seemed tranquil and serene. After my short hike through this peaceful Scottish landscape I arrived at Overtoun House. You couldn't mistake it for anywhere else.

Overtoun is a stunning Gothic mansion in Dumbarton, built in the 1860s by the wealthy industrialist James White. After White's death, his son John inherited the estate. John White, later first Baron of Overtoun, wanted to expand the estate by building a road connecting the eastern and western sides of the grounds and having the Overtoun Bridge erected. The house and bridge were later said to have been haunted after John's death by his grieving widow, also known as the 'White Lady of Overtoun'. She was said to have been devastated by the loss of her husband, and for years she had been seen walking back and forth across the bridge, her husband's last creation; perhaps the intensity of her grief left an imprint on the stones of the bridge. Some claim that her spirit is still seen by dogs crossing the bridge, possessing the unfortunate creatures and making them jump to their deaths; are they carrying out an act she herself had contemplated many years before while walking across the bridge?

BELOW LEFT: Overtoun Bridge, crossing the ravine between the east and west sides of the estate. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The fast-flowing stream below the bridge.

PHOTOS: EMILIA UKKONEN

There are those who believe that the area around Overtoun is a so-called "thin place" where the veil between this world and the spiritual realm is more permeable and spirits from the Other Side can pass into our reality more easily than they do elsewhere. The residents of the area are particularly superstitious and many have reported the presence of something otherworldly in the Overtoun grounds. There are reports of people being touched by invisible ghostly hands while on the bridge.

If there is a place where one would expect to see a ghost or hear ghost stories, this 19th century piece of Scottish Gothic is it. It could very well be used as the setting for a remake of *The Haunting of Hill House*. Of course all of Scotland's mansions, castles and ruins have a portion of grim tales to tell, but this dark, gloomy structure seems like an open invitation to the spinning of ghostly tales.

The first thing that put a smile on my face was the dog-walking service van I encountered. The area is very popular with dog-walkers – and no wonder, given the lush greenery and the natural beauty of the place. Passing the van, I headed to the bridge. It is a very heavily built stone structure for the narrow and shallow current that runs under it, but I can't say that I felt anything out of the ordinary while crossing it. I preferred to investigate the immediate area further. A small path takes you down to where you can walk under the bridge itself. The stream that runs there is not very wide or deep, but the current is rather strong. The

PHOTOS: EMILIA UKKONEN

ABOVE: Scottish Gothic: Overtoun House looms out of the surrounding forest. **BELOW CENTRE:** Dogs and humans all survived the crossing on this occasion. **BOTTOM:** Overtoun House is now a Christian centre offering a residential care facility for women in crisis; the beautiful tearoom is open to the public.

path follows the stream. If you believe in fairies and elves, this is where you might expect to see them. The trees and ground are covered with green moss and ivy that make the forest look quite mystical. The only time I felt something strange was when I was down in the stream and had a sensation of being watched: I could see the house between the trees, and it was as if it had a presence of its own and was keeping an eye on me.

After my little adventure in the forest I decided to take some refreshment at Overtoun House. As I walked back, a woman crossed the bridge just in front of me with her golden retriever. The dog was not on a leash and it looked as if it had just been paddling in a muddy pond. I did not observe anything strange in the dog's behaviour and it did not seem to have the slightest interest in jumping from the bridge. We all got across safely.

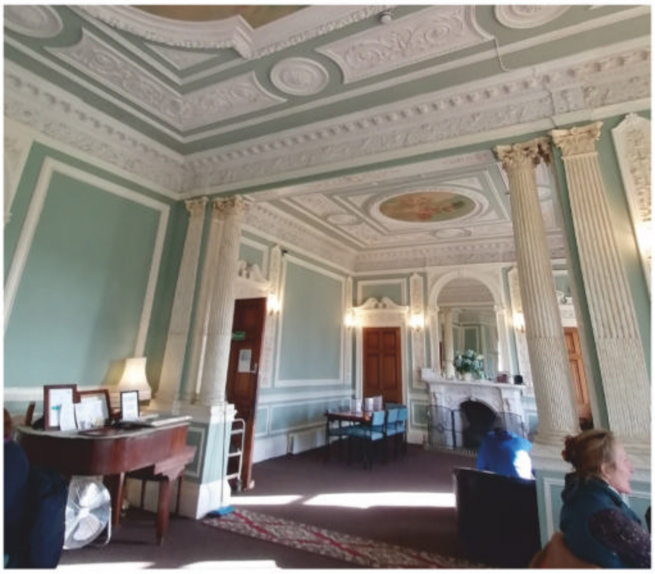
It was a beautiful day, although uneventful. The Christian centre that now runs Overtoun House has opened it to the public as a tearoom. It has a small inexpensive lunch menu from which you can choose salads, sandwiches and filled baked potatoes as well as a variety of cakes and buns and hot and cold drinks. I could imagine that there had been very few changes to the interior since the house was built; the ceilings are painted with angels and cherubs. You can enjoy your cheesecake and hot chocolate while gazing up at these or through the window at the serene Scottish landscape outside. I enjoyed a well-deserved tuna salad after my hike in the forest.

It was as if the house was keeping an eye on me

Even though I did not experience anything remotely supernatural on my journey, I can still wholeheartedly recommend visiting if you happen to be in Scotland. This may not be the most infamous haunted location in Scotland, but Overtoun House and bridge and the surrounding area do have a special, enigmatic atmosphere all their own.

More info at overtounhouse.org/

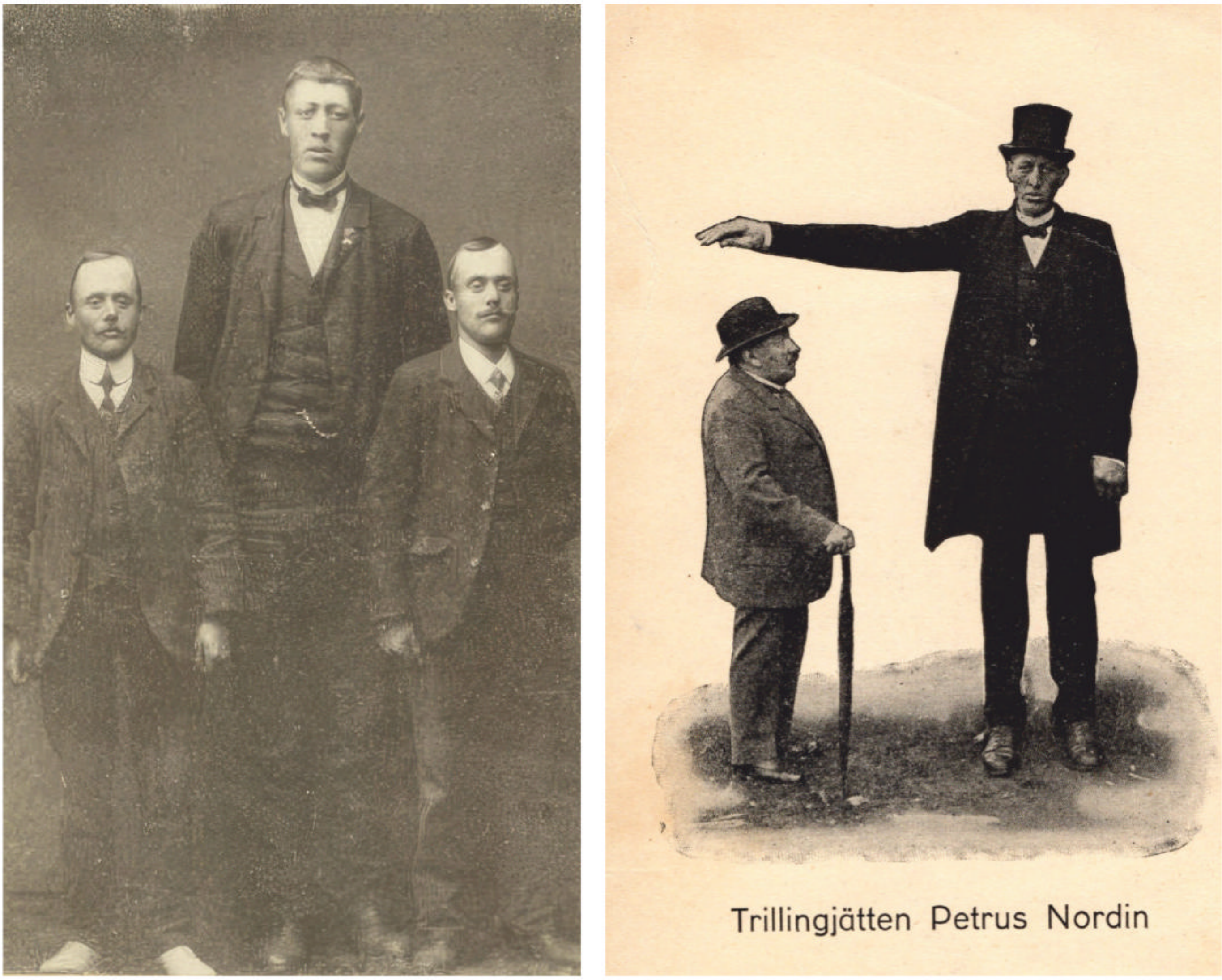
EMILIA UKKONEN is a visual artist from Finland and has a fascination with everything paranormal.



PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past brings us the the one-time tallest man in Sweden and some other European giants

43.THE TRIPLET GIANT AND OTHERS

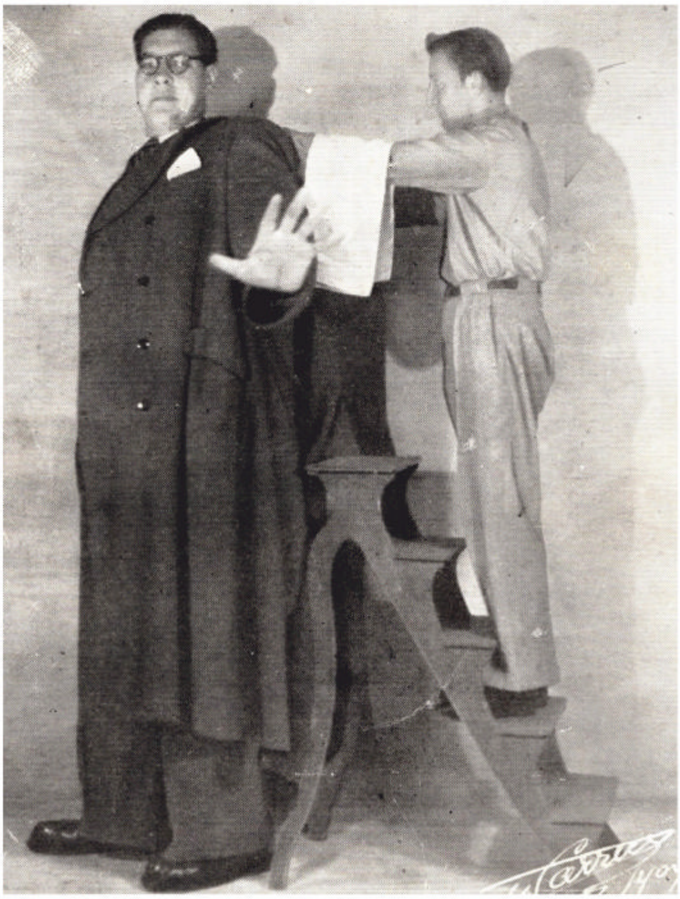


ABOVE LEFT: A cabinet card showing Petrus Nordin and his two triplet brothers. **ABOVE RIGHT** Petrus the Triplet Giant, together with a short and chubby Swede.

In February 2020, I was informed by a Scandinavian reader of *The Lion Boy and other Medical Curiosities* that a number of postcards featuring human curiosities were offered for sale on the Swedish internet auction site Tradera. Upon investigation, this turned out to be the truth: a swift dawn raid was carried out, and 14 cards secured for £32.

As a teenager, Petrus started growing at an alarming rate

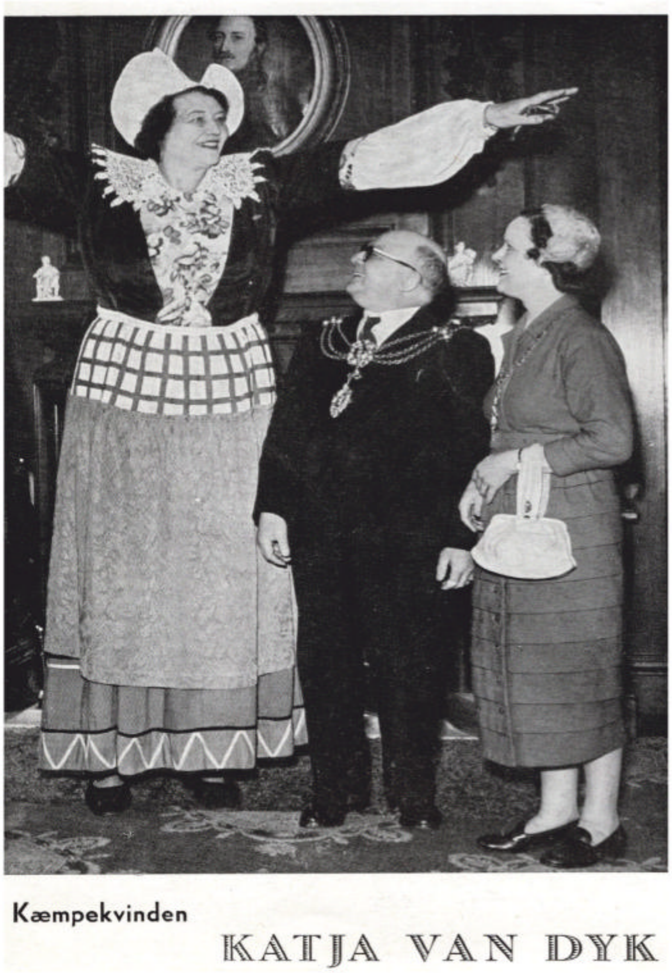
The most interesting card depicted the Swedish 'Triplet Giant' Petrus Nordin, who was born on 13 April 1882 as one of three triplet boys. His father was a poor tailor, who received a municipal grant of 10 kronor (15 shillings) a month to feed his hungry sons. As a youngster, Petrus was of normal stature, in fact the shortest of the three triplet brothers. But as a teenager, he started growing at an alarming rate, becoming a giant. Since his hands and feet were of enormous size, he was slow and clumsy in his movements. It is only in the fairy stories that giants are stupid: Petrus did well at school and became a skilful card player as an adult. Being very strong and sturdy, he first worked as an agricultural labourer, being able to lift heavy objects and pull free carts that had got stuck in the muddy fields.



As an adult, Petrus was 7ft 3in (2.18m) tall and thus far from an extreme among giants. He was the tallest man in Sweden, however, and soon threw away his agricultural overalls and donned an elegant black coat and a tall hat to start a career in show business. He enjoyed moderate success as a professional giant, being exhibited at fairs and markets before the gaping populace. For a while, he joined a circus and visited St Petersburg.

He retired in 1914, becoming a worker at the Sandviken iron foundry, where his size and strength made him a useful asset. Every summer, Petrus went to show himself at the Skansen open air museum in Stockholm for a few weeks, since he was very popular in the Swedish capital. His last performance took place in 1920. The same year, he had to stop working, since his feet and legs were too weak to carry his tall and sturdy body, as it was expressed at the time, and since his eyesight was becoming blurred. Since he had failed to accumulate any earnings during his show business career, he was taken to an old people's home, where he spent his declining years in a specially made giant-sized wheelchair, before expiring in 1927.

The diagnosis of Petrus Nordin is gigantism and acromegaly caused by a pituitary adenoma with overproduction of growth hormone. The postcard shows his acromegaloid face, enormous hands and feet, and very long arms and legs, eunuchoid body proportions caused by hypogonadism secondary to pituitary insufficiency as a result of the adenoma compressing the healthy tissue. The weakness in the lower extremities developing in his late thirties might be the result of acromegalic arthropathy of the knees, and his near-blindness is likely to be secondary to the relentlessly growing pituitary adenoma compressing the chiasma of the optic nerves. Petrus Nordin might well be unique in the world as a giant being one of a trio of triplet boys.

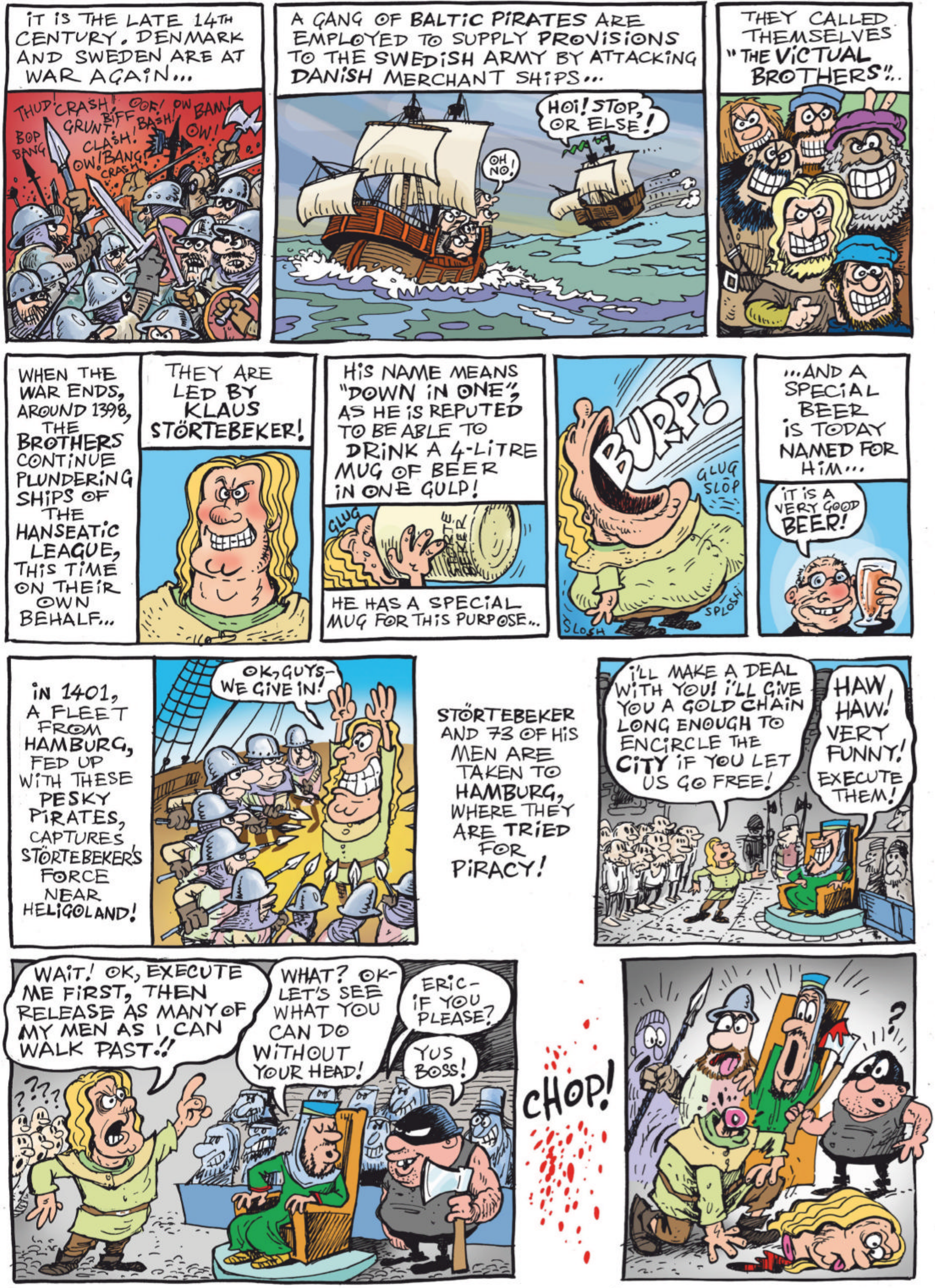


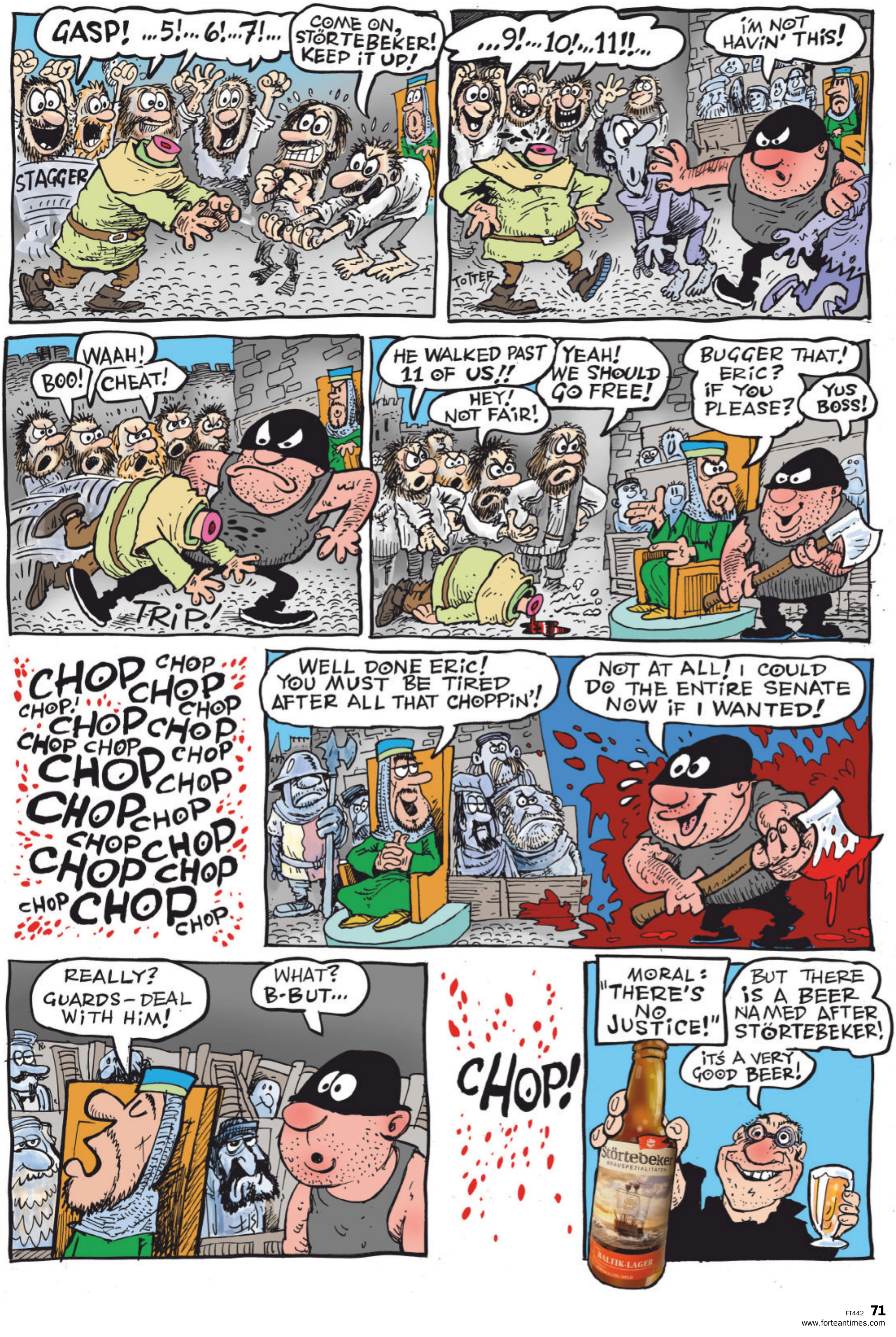
TOP LEFT: The Belgian giant Ferdinand on show in Sweden at the age of 21. According to the text on the back, he ate three loaves of bread and 20 eggs with his breakfast, and 35 meatballs, 6lb of potatoes and 10 bottles of beer with his dinner. **ABOVE LEFT**: The Swedish giant girl Anna Gustafsson. **ABOVE LEFT**: The Dutch giantess Katja van Dyk on show in Denmark. The card was signed on the back by the tall performer, who toured Britain in the 1950s.

PHENOMENOMIX

STÖRTEBEKER

HUNT EMERSON

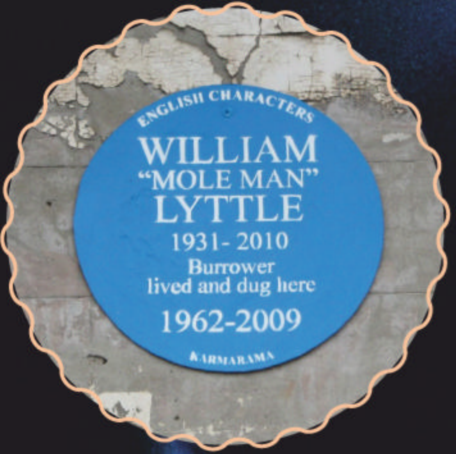

IT IS THE LATE 14TH CENTURY. DENMARK AND SWEDEN ARE AT WAR AGAIN...
THUD! CRASH! OOF! OW BAM! GRUNT! BIFF BASH! BOP BANG CLASH! OW! OW! BANG! CRASH!
A GANG OF BALTIC PIRATES ARE EMPLOYED TO SUPPLY PROVISIONS TO THE SWEDISH ARMY BY ATTACKING DANISH MERCHANT SHIPS...
HOI! STOP, OR ELSE!
OH NO!
THEY CALLED THEMSELVES "THE VICTUAL BROTHERS"...
WHEN THE WAR ENDS, AROUND 1398, THE BROTHERS CONTINUE PLUNDERING SHIPS OF THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE, THIS TIME ON THEIR OWN BEHALF...
THEY ARE LED BY KLAUS STÖRTEBEKER!
HIS NAME MEANS "DOWN IN ONE", AS HE IS REPUTED TO BE ABLE TO DRINK A 4-LITRE MUG OF BEER IN ONE GULP!
GLUG
STÖRTE BEKER
HE HAS A SPECIAL MUG FOR THIS PURPOSE...
BURP!
GLUG SLOP
SLOSH
SPLOSH
...AND A SPECIAL BEER IS TODAY NAMED FOR HIM...
IT IS A VERY GOOD BEER!
IN 1401, A FLEET FROM HAMBURG, FED UP WITH THESE PESKY PIRATES, CAPTURES STÖRTEBEKER'S FORCE NEAR HELIGOLAND!
OK, GUYS - WE GIVE IN!
STÖRTEBEKER AND 73 OF HIS MEN ARE TAKEN TO HAMBURG, WHERE THEY ARE TRIED FOR PIRACY!
I'LL MAKE A DEAL WITH YOU! I'LL GIVE YOU A GOLD CHAIN LONG ENOUGH TO ENCIRCLE THE CITY IF YOU LET US GO FREE!
HAW, HAW! VERY FUNNY! EXECUTE THEM!
WAIT! OK, EXECUTE ME FIRST, THEN RELEASE AS MANY OF MY MEN AS I CAN WALK PAST!!
???
WHAT? OK - LET'S SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO WITHOUT YOUR HEAD!
ERIC - IF YOU PLEASE?
YUS BOSS!
CHOP!
?


GASP! ...5!...6!...7!...
COME ON, STÖRTEBEKER! KEEP IT UP!
STAGGER
...9!...10!...11!!...
I'M NOT HAVIN' THIS!
TOTTER
BOO!
WAAH!
CHEAT!
TRIP!
HE WALKED PAST 11 OF US!!
HEY! NOT FAIR!
YEAH! WE SHOULD GO FREE!
BUGGER THAT! ERIC? IF YOU PLEASE?
YUS BOSS!
CHOP CHOP
CHOP! CHOP CHOP
CHOP CHOP
CHOP CHOP CHOP
CHOP CHOP
CHOP CHOP
CHOP CHOP
CHOP CHOP
CHOP CHOP CHOP
WELL DONE ERIC! YOU MUST BE TIRED AFTER ALL THAT CHOPPIN'!
NOT AT ALL! I COULD DO THE ENTIRE SENATE NOW IF I WANTED!
REALLY? GUARDS – DEAL WITH HIM!
WHAT? B-BUT...
CHOP!
MORAL: "THERE'S NO JUSTICE!"
BUT THERE IS A BEER NAMED AFTER STÖRTEBEKER!
IT'S A VERY GOOD BEER!
Störtebeker
BRAUSPEZIALITÄTEN
BALTIK-LAGER

COMING NEXT MONTH

A HAUNTING IN VENICE

A FORTEAN TOUR OF THE FLOATING CITY



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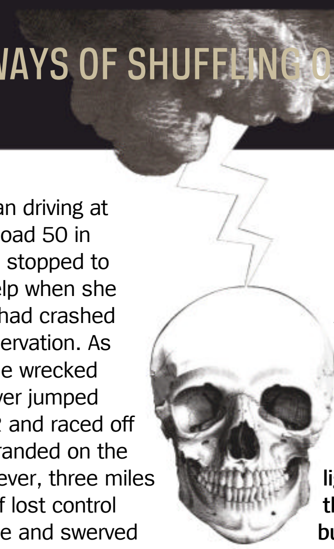
STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



A 35-year-old woman driving at night along State Road 50 in Brooksville, Florida, stopped to see if she could help when she spotted a car that had crashed into the central reservation. As she investigated the wrecked GMC Sierra, its driver jumped into her Chevy HHR and raced off in it, leaving her stranded on the dark highway. However, three miles further on, the thief lost control of the stolen vehicle and swerved into the oncoming lane, colliding head-on with an articulated truck. He was not wearing a seat belt and "suffered fatal injuries". *nypost.com, 25 Jan 2024.*

Police attending an incident in DeLand, Florida, arrested Travis McBride, 46, a licensed anger management therapist. A caller had alerted police after seeing McBride drag a body across the road, put it in his car, and drive away. Asked if they knew where he had gone, the caller told police: "I just saw him drag the body across the road. He put it in his car, and then he left, and then he came back, and not even 10 minutes ago he started scrubbing the road, and now I see him in the yard with a flashlight looking around." Deputies found drops of blood and a used 9mm shell near McBride's driveway. "We believe there was an ongoing dispute between McBride and our victim," identified as Clinton Dorsey, 51, said DeLand Police Chief Jason Umberger. "I don't know if they knew each other, but they knew *of* each other. It unfortunately ended in one man's death." McBride, who had a criminal record involving repeated violent behaviour going back to 1995, was charged with first degree premediated murder. *metro.co.uk, 23 Jan 2024.*

Maison Sere, from Zimbabwe, a national celebrity after being voted the ugliest person in the country, was found dead on the toilet at home in Mabvuki in December, resulting in the *Daily Star* titling the report of his death "Ugly Fella Plops Out". Sere, 51, won Zimbabwe's "Mr Ugly" title four times, receiving a significant amount of prize money in the process. His friends said of him, "There was no funeral gathering around Mabvuki that he didn't attend for beer" and linked his death to the alcohol and drug addictions he had fallen into after his winnings ran out. Sere's victories were not without controversy; rivals claimed that he was actually average-looking and only considered ugly because he was missing so many teeth, including all those in his front upper jaw. *D.Star, 9 Dec 2023.*

A fire in a truck load of butane cannisters triggered a major blaze at the vape distribution centre it was delivering to in Clinton, Michigan. As the warehouse, which stored butane, nitrous oxide, lighter fluid and vape pens, burned, the smaller cannisters inside the building started exploding, with the blasts producing shrapnel that was later found up to two miles away. Lee Salter, 19, was at a car wash on 15 Mile Road, more than a quarter of a mile away from the inferno, when he was struck in the face by a 15-pound metal cannister that had been blasted out of the building, killing him instantly. The force of the explosions embedded other large cannisters, apparently stored illegally at the warehouse, in buildings and cars across the area, such was the power of the blasts. *eu.detroitnews.com, 6 Mar; dailymail.co.uk, 7 Mar 2024.*

Gila monsters, half-metre (20in) long lizards endemic to the southern US, have toxic saliva, delivered through grooved teeth; in humans a bite usually produces a short but intense burst of pain, followed by swelling, nausea, and weakness. "It's like getting your hand slammed, caught in a car door," says Arizona State University vet Dale DeNardo. "Even that initial pain is extended for an hour. Then you get the typical days of soreness, throbbing pain. It's much worse than any bee, wasp, or scorpion." There is no antivenom, but bites are not usually fatal to humans. When Christopher Ward, 34, from Jefferson County, Colorado, was bitten on the hand by one of his pet Gilas, Winston, his reaction was worse than normal; he began vomiting and struggling to breathe within minutes and, despite being rushed to hospital and being put on life support, he died four days later. This makes him just the second person in the last century alleged to have died from Gila monster venom. There have only been six other recorded deaths from Gila venom and the reliability of all but one of these is heavily disputed. Ward's death is being considered the result of sensitivity to the venom, but Winston and his brother, Potato, have been taken to a reptile sanctuary in South Dakota where tests will be carried out on their venom to see if it has unique qualities that may have contributed to Ward's death. *sciencealert.com, 27 Feb 2024.*

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